

Ubuntu as a Departure Point for Social Work Education in African Universities

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Abstract

Ubuntu reflects the African view of the world and being human. Social work is one of several professions that recognise the significance of Ubuntu principles of justice, communality, reciprocity, responsibility and relations. However, there is limited inclusion of Ubuntu in the social work curriculum in Africa. This is critical, as the principles of Ubuntu cannot guide prospective social workers in Africa if they are not integrated into the curriculum of students. The research aimed to explore stakeholders' experiences in including the Ubuntu principle in the social work curriculum at selected African universities. The empirical research sampled 36 social work educators and students (12 educators and 24 students) from two African countries, Nigeria and South Africa. Data was collected from the participants using interviews, and the data was coded with NVivo 12 and analysed thematically. The findings highlight the centrality of Ubuntu in social work education to ensure a better future where communities assist each other and nature is respected and preserved for future generations. We concluded that Ubuntu must be intentionally integrated into the social work curriculum to empower African social workers with cultural and context relevant knowledge and practices, ensuring that interventions are deeply rooted in the lived realities of African communities.

Keywords: African universities; curriculum; social work; Ubuntu



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Introduction

Historically, social work education and practice in Africa have been grounded in Western knowledge, practices and methodologies. In the 21st century, African social workers have taken it upon themselves to own their profession and embed indigenous knowledge into the curriculum to decolonise the programme and make it comprehensive in providing services to Africans by Africans (Hendricks 2023). Since espousing the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the social work programme, the rest of the globe has come on board in support of the notion of decolonising the social work curriculum and seeking collaboration with African scholars (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019). There has been so much development around decolonising the social work curriculum that the first theme of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2020-2030 is “*Ubuntu: Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness*” (Mayaka and Truell 2021). The theme encourages social work professionals globally to explore and adopt African indigenous knowledge into the programmes and practice (Mayaka and Truell 2021). Ubuntu is at the centre of decolonising the social work curriculum in Africa; it focuses on peoples’ morals (compassion, generosity, empathy, and civility), and this provides a worldview of seeing oneself through the eyes of others (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019).

Van Breda (2020) summarises the Ubuntu philosophy or worldview as rooted deeply in African indigeneity. A great starting point for including Ubuntu is adopting the indigenous social work values described by Hendricks (2023). Mugumbate, Mupedziswa and Twikirize (2024) describe the values as the power of community (this value embraces cultural diversity and also focuses on establishing finance and sustainable projects using indigenous ideas to elevate rural communities). The second value is the value of hospitality interlinked with social and sincere relationship-building, embracing visitors in an African household is a sign of respect also, and assisting (food, finance and empathy) a neighbour or fellow community member has been the order of the day for centuries since before people in rural communities even knew of the existence of social work. The third value is an interconnectedness with the environment (embracing totems and the preservation of nature in general). With the guidance of community members and other stakeholders on refining and embedding these values into the social work programme, it aims to address some of the standards set out in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, which are:

The failure to address worsening inequality is increasing instability and undermining social relationships. Planning for sustainability and well-being for all in healthy environments benefits individuals and humanity. Valuing and involving people in decision-making and respecting local knowledge and indigenous knowledge produce better and more sustainable interventions. Demonstrating support for respectful relationships and building on people’s strengths create the best outcomes (Mugumbate, Mupedziswa and Twikirize 2024). Respecting the practice experience of practitioners in social work and development strengthens the effectiveness of social policy. Ensuring

a positive working environment with relationship-based management draws out the best in practice. Resourcing education, training, and continuing personal development and research are crucial both for organisational effectiveness and for professional practice” (IFSW 2020; O’Leary and Tsui 2021, 830).

The social work profession is deeply rooted in the “principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities” (Osawe 2018, 332). This paper exemplifies that for social workers to better interact with their clients and address social challenges, the *Ubuntu* philosophy is key to accepting the clients for who they are and embracing their beliefs.

The connection between social work, development, and Ubuntu is well-recognised as the profession’s knowledge base (Ekoh 2023). Indigenous social work further focuses on the person-in-environment (PIE) perspective, which explores how available resources in a community can improve people’s development (Turton 2018). This article illustrates the importance of Ubuntu social work in ensuring a better future for everyone as it holds people accountable for the conservation of natural and community resources to conserve them for future generations (van Breda 2019).

Although Ubuntu’s place in social work practice and philosophy is gaining traction globally, many African social work researchers are exploring the implementation of Ubuntu in different areas of practice. For instance, van Breda (2019) wrote about the development of Ubuntu as a social work theory in Africa. Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) investigated the value of Ubuntu in social work practice. Mayaka and Truell (2021) explored Ubuntu and its potential impact on the international social work profession. Mabovula (2011) reappraised Ubuntu philosophy in the face of the erosion of African communal values. Ekoh and Ajwang (2023) explored the role of Ubuntu in social work practice with migrants. However, little is known about the place of Ubuntu in social work education in Africa. This is critical, as the principles of Ubuntu cannot guide prospective social workers in Africa if they are not integrated into students’ education. This article is a response to the many appeals made by social workers to end epistemic colonisation and present alternative philosophies that support social work ideals outside the horizon of Western colonial rule.

This article explored the inclusion of Ubuntu in the social work curriculum at two African universities. Many African universities still use 100% Western ideologies in their social work curriculum, which does not embrace the post-colonial regime (Moyo 2021). Furthermore, the majority of social workers’ clientele are Africans, which means that there is a gap in service delivery when African philosophies such as Ubuntu are not embraced and taught at universities across the African continent. This article can significantly open the minds of social work educators to embrace African philosophies and literature into their curriculum to ensure that social work practitioners are able to embrace diversity and better understand their clients.

Methods

The paper adopted a qualitative research approach, which, according to De Vos et al. (2011), is a detailed exploration and review of a certain social phenomenon (adoption of Ubuntu principle and values) in its original environment (selected universities). Qualitative research mainly focuses on the personal experiences of persons regarding a certain phenomenon. The researchers used an interpretive exploratory research design that explores how participants (social work academic staff and students) understand the embedding of Ubuntu principles and values into the social work curriculum. The phenomenon under study was the inclusion of Ubuntu into the social work education curriculum in Nigeria and South Africa in aid of decolonising the curriculum. The research design did not allow for any form of bias or pre-conceived contextualisation, as only the participants could clearly articulate their thoughts on the subject matter.

This qualitative study adopted in-depth interviewing (IDI) to collect data from social work educators and undergraduate students in two universities teaching social work in Nigeria and South Africa. IDI was adopted in the study because it allows researchers to discuss issues about a phenomenon in-depth rather than using structured, standardised questions (Babbie, 2010). Two universities were purposively selected for the study because they were among the universities offering social work programmes in Nigeria and South Africa.

Thirty-six participants were purposively and conveniently sampled for the study. These were 12 social work educators (six each from both universities) and 24 social work students in the penultimate and ultimate levels (level 3 and level 4 students) (12 from each university). The criteria for selecting social work educators were that the person must have been teaching social work in the universities chosen for six years or more and that the person was willing to participate in the interview. The social work educators' experience in designing programmes in social work was also considered, so they were well-positioned to reflect upon the importance of incorporating stakeholders into social work education in African universities. Also, the 24 social work students in the penultimate and ultimate levels (levels 3 and 4) were purposively selected based on the belief that their having spent a decent number of years in the school system gives them the requisite experience to assess the phenomenon under study adequately. This reflects good practice in qualitative sampling for research in terms of relevance and representativeness (Robinson 2014). Despite the fact that our sample size ($n=36$) was modest, the qualitative nature of the study allowed for enough information to be provided by the sample to attain data saturation (Nelson 2017).

Semi-structured in-depth interview guides were the instruments utilised for data collection. The use of the tools for the interviews was informed by their relevance in eliciting richly detailed information from study participants using open-ended questions and allowing participants to express their views more freely without being construed to answer structured questions (Babbie 2010). The interview guides consisted of five main

open-ended questions with probes that enabled the researchers to access detailed opinions expressed by the participants. Examples of key questions included in the tools are: What do you have to say about Ubuntu in social work? What is your viewpoint on including Ubuntu in social work education modules/curriculum?

The interviews were conducted in English and were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. Given that the researchers were colleagues of the social work educators from the selected African universities, all participants' responses were treated confidentially, and there was no incentive or obligation to participate in the study. A face-to-face interviewing approach was adopted, and the COVID-19 safety guidelines and protocols were duly observed. Ethical issues associated with qualitative research were discussed and addressed with participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, concealment of identity, and data management. Participants were reassured that pseudonyms would be used when alluding to their responses. The researchers ensured credibility by not subjecting their opinions and remaining impartial. Additionally, the researchers notified participants that the data collected would be published widely and electronic copies would be shared with participants once published. The interviews commenced after the participants had read the participant information sheet and duly signed the consent form. Data collection was done between April and July 2022. Each of the interviews lasted between 50 and 60 minutes to avoid fatigue, and the participants were not incentivised to participate in the study. The interviews took place at the times and venues chosen by the participants. All the participants' responses were treated with utmost confidentiality and securely stored in a password-encrypted computer for safety.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure complete dataset coverage for quality analysis. We further double-checked the transcripts to ensure quality and consistency. Coding of the dataset in the transcripts started with simple descriptive codes to more analytical and abstract codes using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. Codes with the same central idea were merged, and codes with similar ideas were grouped in hierarchical order to create a coding tree consisting of staff and student notes. The coded data were analysed thematically. We searched for patterns or themes in the notes and sorted them to group codes with associations together into emerging and subthemes. The researchers reviewed the emerging themes for consistency and frequency. The themes were discussed in detail in the results section below. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Health Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nigeria, Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu (ref: NHREC/05/01/2008B-FWA00002458 -1RB00002323) and Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the University of Fort Hare (ref: HEN011EAHI01).

Presentation of Findings

Socio-demographic Information of the Participants

The study had 36 participants in total, consisting of 12 social work lecturers (6 from South Africa and six from Nigeria) and 24 students at 3rd and 4th-year levels (12 from South Africa and 12 from Nigeria). The participants consisted of males and females for both staff and students. All staff were African, majority of students were African except two South African students who were white and coloured females. All the staff members were experienced academics with 5 years plus experience, and they were all Doctoral graduates (Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work). The staff members who were interviewed have all included some aspects of Ubuntu in their modules.

Identified Themes

Two themes were identified during data analysis when participants were asked about their views on the inclusion of Ubuntu into the social work curriculum:

- Theme one: Adoption of Ubuntu values in social work practice and
- Theme two: The importance of including Ubuntu in the social work curriculum.

Theme one: Adoption of Ubuntu values in social work practice

In aid of addressing this concern, African social work academics are urging Africans to embrace epistemic diversity and criticising Western colonialism, which has led to the imposition of Western social work. Some African educationalists advanced and included the Ubuntu values into their teaching to help decolonise social work academia and practice and to help provide effective services to the continent's indigenous people. African clients accepted the ideals because they were consistent with their native culture, and social work services were Africanised in a way that appealed to the continent's most vulnerable citizens, including women, children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, diminishing inequity. The quotes below are feedback from students who were taught Ubuntu values and staff who included the values in their modules.

Indigenous knowledge is limited in the curriculum, but for now, Ubuntu and Restorative Justice are covered at length. Learning about the power of community as an Ubuntu value made me realise that the government has been failing its people for decades. Communities have been supporting one another for many years, and for the social work profession to acknowledge and embrace that is wonderful. By embracing the power of community and the indigenous knowledge communities possess, social workers will connect better with communities, learn different skills, and acquire knowledge exclusive to Africans (Student 7, SA).

The authors are of the opinion that communal support became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where communities supported each other through sharing herbal medicines, which saved many lives in remote areas far from hospitals. Another example

of creating a sense of community occurs especially during the festive season in South Africa where persons from urban areas go to children's homes or remote churches to donate clothes, food and stationery to those in need. At some universities, social work student associations establish donation banks where their peers can donate clothes, non-perishable foodstuff and sanitary pads to alleviate the struggle of especially first time entering non-funded students. All these initiatives create a sense of togetherness for everyone, irrespective of your class, gender or ethnicity.

Acknowledging African totems is one of the Ubuntu values that is unique to Africans. An example is when someone belongs to the clan Jola (which means a snake). That clan does not kill snakes when they come across them, they praise the snake as it is their totem. Being taught about the different totems really opens one's mind to respect diversity and understand the personality of others better once you are aware of their totems (Student 10, SA).

Decolonial pedagogy through teaching Ubuntu values. This helps social work students go to the field already equipped with African social work theory appropriate for the African client system, such as respect for one's environment (Staff 6, SA).

Globally, social work has been shaped by Eurocentric perspectives, values, and epistemologies. A holistic approach is promoted in social work practice. The goal of attending to each client's needs, as well as the ways that the community and society address those needs, has been consistently promoted by the profession. As a result, social work has always been concerned with both the environment and the psychosocial welfare of the individual (Chigangaidze 2022). The participant's outlook stems from the value of environmental interconnectedness, which highlights that family and community teach the value of our interconnectedness as humans with the environment through the Ubuntu philosophy.

First of all, Ubuntu means "humanity" or "I am because we are"; it also emphasises being self through others. Now looking at the statement "being self through others" simply means what makes a social worker what he/she is the first-hand knowledge he or she uses to solve problems or to help others help themselves; this first-hand knowledge is acquired from absorbing experience and knowledge from different individuals. Secondly, what makes a social worker to be an effective practitioner, is his or her ability to help individuals from any locality to help themselves, the locality notwithstanding. So, Ubuntu values in social work education module development will inform the social worker of his or her true identity of serving everyone (serving humanity) (Student 24, NG).

The power of community is a long-standing value across the African continent, where Africans for decades have assisted each other with whatever is lacking in their households. This is what is considered the true sense of Ubuntu helping your neighbour in their time of need without expecting anything in return (Moyo 2021).

We already have the Ubuntu theory from which values were established, Isusu (savings scheme), age grade association, and spirituality, among others. I think these local contents are enough as they have been achieving the purpose of generating social work practice informed by indigenous knowledge (Student 21, NG).

Ubuntu values embody the core aspects of social work practice; I think it denotes inclusion, humanity and compassion, fairness and helping each other grow in unity (Staff 12, NG).

Clients feel valued and respected when a social worker from a different ethnic group attempts to understand their belief systems and how they have dealt with issues prior to the social worker's arrival. By being able to express their beliefs, they feel included in the intervention process, and the majority of the time, the intervention process becomes seamless as all parties cooperate.

Emphasising much on the principle of humanity. At some point, social workers will have clients who are ignorant, passive, or aggressive; it is very important to understand human behaviour so that every social worker can practice humanity. Ubuntu values have much influence in social work practice; hence, they should not be turned a blind eye to. There are some basics that social workers must stick to, values such as greeting the clients exhibiting accommodative actions. This makes clients feel welcomed and helps them gain confidence in the social worker. Embracing Ubuntu is the point of departure in equipping social work students to deliver appropriate and necessary social work services to their client system. Those values include respect, generosity, and hospitality, among others. It is beyond the shadow of a doubt that a client may feel free to open up when they feel their relationship with the social worker is accommodative and they feel respected. Respecting the client does not mean the social worker has to agree with the client always, but the approach that the social worker uses to show the client that their disagreement has much influence during the intervention process. All in all, Ubuntu opens all doors for successful social work intervention and should by no means be underrated. So, social work education should not drift from the African indigenous knowledge and practices for effective intervention (Student 4, SA).

Corroborating the findings of this article, Ubuntu fosters teamwork and collaboration, which encourages group cohesion and support (Eze 2008). A strong sense of belonging to a group, be it a support group, recreational group, or community initiative, serves as its cornerstone. Additionally, this concept aims to advance the inherent worth of every person, with a focus on self-dignity.

Theme two: The importance of including Ubuntu in the social work curriculum

African social work educators head back to the 1970s, urging a desire to make social work education more relevant to the developing environment in Africa. The proposal acknowledges the need for indigenous knowledge (Ubuntu) and culturally sensitive approaches to support social work for a sustainable future on the African continent for individuals, groups, and communities. Participants were of the view that:

African society's way of life is very synonymous with the value of "Ubuntu" (humanity), which can be referred to as the spirit of selflessness, the spirit of empathy, the spirit of upholding norms, tradition, standards and values of society, and the spirit of respect for oneself and respect for others. Therefore, social work education theory modules across all levels in Africa should be influenced by the value and ethos entrenched in the Ubuntu philosophy due to the qualities that resonate well with local African societies (Staff 1, SA).

Another staff member explained:

Ubuntu, as an African ideology, helps in guiding the interactions to fight against oppression, cruelty, injustices, and humiliation. This ideology aligns well with the principles of social work and ethical guidelines. Thus, it is crucial to teach African students about Ubuntu from their first year to ensure the best ethical practices and preserve indigenous knowledge (Staff 2, SA).

Ubuntu, which is an African ideology, focuses on people's allegiances and relations with each other; in other words, "I am because we are". Ubuntu is a great ideology, which promotes team spirit, multi-disciplinary and inter-professional coexistence, and above all, seeing a client as not only a solution seeker but also extended brethren in the society is part of what makes social work unique and different from other professions (Mabovula 2011). This underscores Ubuntu.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy referring to humanness. It expresses deeply held African ideals of one's personhood being rooted in one's interconnectedness with others. In social work education modules, Ubuntu can be seen as illegible to stand as a leading or basic theory guiding practice, for 'Ubuntu' and being socially active can never be separated due to the opinion that for a social worker to be valuable and effective in his/her practice, he/she needs to be transparent and genuine. Therefore, Ubuntu (the concept) clearly describes humanness, ethics, morals and the aims of social values. It would, additionally, be useful as a tool to assist in the decolonisation of our people (Student 2, SA).

The authors are of the view that to decolonise the dissemination of Western knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work in Africa, indigenous knowledge must be incorporated into social work education across the continent. This is predicated on the need to decolonise social work practice in Africa and create more potent indigenous theories and methodologies that could solve regional issues to promote more sustainable social work education and practice in the area.

Ubuntu is the key catalyst for social work, and it should be well integrated into all social work modules. It is well known that embracing Ubuntu is the point of departure in social work; it applies too that it should be well taught and exposed details to social work students so that they get equipped to deliver appropriate and effective services to their client system. We cannot define social work without Ubuntu. In this case, in social work education, it should not be taken for granted because it is the key to making social work

students work effectively with others as it states, “I am who I am because of others”. In such cases, the concepts of respect, generosity, and hospitality, among others, must be well developed and centralised in social work modules as part of Afrocentric pedagogy. Hence, in social work education, Ubuntu must be considered significant because it is the key to unlocking complex issues for effective social work interventions when working with diversity (Student 1, SA).

Ubuntu social work encourages embracing diversity, which is very important for the development and cohesion of a specific community (Eze 2008).

The ideals of Ubuntu should be the primary principle in the social work domain. The social work modules must instil Ubuntu in students, for the students to be able to help each other and serve the communities. Students’ social workers must not only visit communities for data collection but also for community services (Staff 4, SA).

Incorporating Ubuntu into the social work curriculum teaches students the importance of going back to assist their communities with the skills and knowledge they acquired at university. It is very common for social work students to be encouraged to serve unfamiliar communities while there is a dire need for aid with things such as applying to university as a high school learner, which a social work student can assist learners with. This brings a sense of great reward to the social work student and appreciation for the community.

Ubuntu will bring back unity in African people as they used to be. Having to rely on the next person when you have a problem will decrease the high crime rate because people will not have to be afraid to ask because they will not be judged and can get assistance without the next person expecting something in return. I think the practice of Ubuntu would improve the world, especially in Africa. Including Ubuntu in social work education will start by shaping social workers to be able to help each other all the time and end the judging that happens towards each other. It will assist in them coming together and discussing problems and then coming up with solutions as a collective, not leaving one hanging because one knows better than the other or would want to prove the point that they are better than the other. Ultimately, social work would find solutions for Africa by incorporating Ubuntu into the curriculum across the continent (Staff 2, SA).

Ubuntu signifies unity and communality. It is the incorporation of Africans’ age-long philosophy of unity into social work practice. It is a good example of how the social work principle of “social cohesion” has been indigenised to portray the collectivistic nature of Africans (Student 23, NG).

The Ubuntu philosophy is deeply rooted in principles of social justice and equality of all persons irrespective of social status (Mungai 2015). One of the basic social work skills taught at level one is a non-judgemental attitude, which closely links with Ubuntu because when a service provider does not judge, it means they accept the client as they are and treat all clients with the same level of respect and dignity. This is exactly how

African children were raised from the beginning of time, and the social work curriculum ought to magnify the positive skills that already exist.

With regards to gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), I think a lot, in terms of literature that speaks to the psyche of African men in general who are still attached to patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes, is needed. Literature places colonialism and apartheid as the genesis of the GBV in SA; this is understandable, but to an extent, it is used as a scapegoat. For as long as patriarchy is not talked about and included in the curriculum, social work intervention in addressing the social challenges in communities will always be ineffective. Up until the system is unclogged through robust discussions, starting in the lecture venues, the realisation of having a curriculum that is grounded in local knowledge is just a pipedream. Ubuntu as an African concept shares similarities with social work values, the Batho Pele principles and rights-based elements of the developmental social welfare approach. It is, therefore, pivotal that Ubuntu be used as a guide if we are genuine in our intentions to infuse African perspectives into social work education (Student 5, SA).

I think since we are experiencing a high rate of food insecurity, gender and family-based violence, poverty, etc., the following can be integrated into social work education modules: Indigenous food security measures; Family trees and their significance in the social-cultural context in the current dispensation; Communalism and Conflict resolutions (Student 5, SA).

The findings corroborate with (Shoba et al. 2024, 13), who asserts that “Ubuntu as a people-centred approach has the potential to inspire community members to play an integral role in fighting gender-based violence, poverty and food insecurity in Africa”. Ubuntu provides a sense of community where people protect and share with one another. It brings back a sense of togetherness and generosity that was somehow disturbed by the apartheid government.

As far as social work is concerned, Ubuntu should be the core principle in the development of SW modules. This is because the value of humanity should come first in any development agenda. Hence, the skills developed through training and interventions should all mirror the value of human relationships. Therefore, the process and outcomes of training and teaching in social work must be value-based. This is more important in the African context, where education systems and curricula are accused of mismatching skills and values to that of African expectations (Staff 5, SA).

This research contends that the Ubuntu philosophy provides a solid foundation and superstructure for African social workers to make ethical decisions. Most Ubuntu ethics are congruent with social work values, ethics, and theoretical frameworks. As a critical ideology in the lives of many Africans, the Ubuntu philosophy provides a significant directing tool for social work professionals working in Africa. Thus, it is of utmost vitality to include Ubuntu in the social work curriculum.

Discussion

Adoption of Ubuntu Values in Social Work Practice

Social work in Africa is still deeply rooted in colonialism. Hence, most offices are based in towns where persons from remote areas must travel long distances to access services. Most municipal and central government organisations were constructed by Europeans in largely metropolitan or peri-urban areas, reflecting the interests of colonialists who liked to live in urban regions (Nnama-Okechukwu et al. 2023). When a case is reported to social work offices, they essentially ‘parachute’ into the remote villages to attend the case and then leave without any follow-up (monitoring) on progress (Hendricks 2023). This is common in South Africa and Nigeria; hence, communities serve as their own first line of defence. Thus, African social work educationists collaborated in developing Ubuntu values, understanding that in rural communities, people are often not assisted due to a lack of resources and government interventions. Using Ubuntu values, students have expressed that they relate to the communities they are assigned to for practicum better than in previous years when they had not yet learned about Ubuntu values.

The majority of social work students are from rural communities across the African continent and understand that communities need to stand together and assist each other. The incorporation of Ubuntu values into a Western curriculum somewhat ensures equity in access to services globally because a large percentage of African social workers have migrated to other parts of the globe outside of the African continent and continue to do so (Ekoh 2023). This viewpoint supports the reality of most communities where family, kinship relationships, and mutual aid groups are essential sources of support for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. As a result of the minimal presence of government interventions, remote areas rely mostly on self-organised community initiatives and structures to deal with socioeconomic challenges. As a result, it remains inconsistent and counter-productive that community-led projects and systems are frequently steeped in indigenous epistemologies and ideologies, receive minimal priority and are marginalised in social work education and practice. The sentiments shared by some participants link with the value of communal power, which states that Ubuntu in social work acknowledges, appreciates, and expands on the potential of communities to fulfil human needs, particularly in remote areas.

The findings above link the value of hospitality with the connection and development of genuine relationships. The virtue of hospitality can be used in social work to teach social work professionals how to deal with individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds in African and globally. Valuing and displaying hospitality aids in the development of connections and genuine relationships between the social worker and the clients with whom they interact. From an Ubuntu perspective, hospitality is an unlimited preparedness to help and share with people on the basis that they are human like yourself. Hospitality is inextricably linked to giving and supporting those in need. A seed can be virtually anything, such as information, advice, someone to talk to, providing directions to someone who is lost, food security, housing, health care, or any

other basic necessities of life. This kind of generosity is admirable, and social work staff emphasise it during their engagement with students in both countries.

Multiple environmental issues are aiding global warming; therefore, it is important to educate social work students about respecting their environment and particularising the vitality of preserving the environment we live in for future generations (Moyo 2021). This teaches people to respect and aid each other and always preserve nature. Since its inception, social work has been concerned with the interactions between humans and their surroundings. Environmental social work has the potential to broaden the profession's scope as green social work is on the rise; many scholars are collaborating across the globe to understand the value of interconnectedness with the environment. Similarly, Ubuntu is the ideology that has the capacity to deliver global messaging for human-environment interactions. Ubuntu values are based on the idea that all persons should participate in community initiatives and subsequently, to the growth of the country. According to the Ubuntu ethos, social service professions such as social work aim to assist clients in focusing their skills and knowledge toward the advancement of sustainable development goals (Mugumbate and Chereni 2020). Ubuntu prioritises the first five social goals: equality (SDG10), inclusivity (SDG16) and partnership (SDG17) (Mayaka and Truell 2021).

Inclusion of Ubuntu into the Social Work Curriculum

Globally, social work has been rooted in Western ideologies for decades. However, in recent years, social work educators and professionals at African institutions of higher learning have started to contextualise their theories and contexts using indigenous knowledge and skills, which are relatable to African scholars. Most institutions of higher learning in Africa use the Ubuntu philosophy as a point of departure when including the African context in the social work curriculum. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that is based on humanness, kindness, communality, and socio-structural issues such as social justice and human rights (Mayaka and Truell 2021). It is basically about humaneness. It gives expression to deeply rooted African ideals of one's personhood being rooted in one's interconnectedness with others. Ubuntu aids social workers to understand and embrace diversity. Also, when embracing diversity, all forms of bias fall away, and social workers can render quality equal services to clients from all walks of life despite their backgrounds.

Furthermore, in response to global challenges, Moyo (2021) corroborates the findings of the research by stating that people should adopt a sense of universal responsibility whereby they do not only work for personal benefit but for the benefit of humanity. This will ensure the survival of humanity amid natural disasters or any type of recession that may occur. The findings coincide with Mungai's (2015) Ubuntu's focus on humanity, which implies that anything beneficial for humans is Ubuntu, while everything that destroys humans opposes Ubuntu. According to Ng'weshemi (2002, 15), "for Africans, one is not human simply by birth." Rather, individuals become human through a gradual absorption into the community." When confronted with the decision between wealth

and preserving the life of an individual, one ought to opt for the preservation of life, which is one of the core principles of Ubuntu's worldview.

Finally, Ubuntu aids in culturally and contextually relevant information that critically demonstrates the significance of learning from indigenous traditions and wisdom. Where indigenous groups are left feeling detached and distanced from their ancestral beliefs, culture, and ways of being, deconstructing comprehension of the colonial legacy is required. Olaore and Drolet (2017) discovered that utilising indigenous practices was effective in Nigeria for both indigenous populations and descendants from other countries. Indigenising social work and appreciating indigenous philosophies and expertise means that effective practices are developed using locally based, culturally and contextually relevant knowledge.

Limitations

The researchers acknowledge the innate study limitations. There were significant time constraints attached to data collection as participants did not stick to their allocated times for interviews. Another limitation of the study is that it was carried out in two countries, Nigeria and South Africa, which does not provide an all-inclusive view of African universities. However, the participants had radical views and offered valuable insight into the significance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and skills into the social work curriculum. One major limitation of internet connectivity is that due to power outages in both countries. During these times, the researchers could not contact each other or the participants. The researchers recommend a more extensive study that includes more countries on the African continent.

Conclusion

Ubuntu places a premium on equity, justice and communality in Africa. The findings are organised into two main themes: the adoption of Ubuntu values in social work practice and the importance of including Ubuntu in the social work curriculum. Ubuntu values aid social workers to move away from colonialism and embrace Afrocentric values, connecting deeper with clients as the larger African population can relate. Including Ubuntu in the social work curriculum will aid in the preservation of indigenous knowledge, which can be passed down for generations to come, thus creating universal knowledge not only for the African continent but to serve diverse clientele globally. It bridges the gap in terms of equality as Ubuntu focuses on embracing diversity and ensuring social inclusion and equal treatment of all clients, irrespective of their background. Finally, through the inclusion of Ubuntu social workers can tailor holistic services with a balance between Eurocentric and Afrocentric knowledge to clients from diverse backgrounds globally.

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