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Indigenous knowledge and social work education in Nigeria: Made in Nigeria or made in the West?

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Abstract:

Social work education in Nigeria is largely dominated by Eurocentric knowledge, theories and beliefs. This has led to a one-sided narrative where Eurocentric ideologies are advanced and indigenous knowledges often sidelined in academic curricula. This non-inclusive teaching and learning methodology acts as a continuous (re)colonization process where knowledge from Europe is imported and planted in the African academy. To contribute to the discussion for indigenous knowledge, this study researched the need for indigenous knowledges in social work education in Nigeria using 18 semi-structured interviews. Participants for the study were made up of 4 social work educators, 10 social work students and 4 social work practitioners. Major findings affirmed that social work education and practice in Nigeria was anchored by Western ideologies rather than indigenous knowledge. It was evident from research findings that indigenous knowledges need to be made more transparent in social work curriculum in Nigeria. Overall, indigenous and Western knowledges need to be blended in the present social work curriculum in Nigeria to ensure the best of both and to off avoid the "danger of a single story"

Keywords: Colonization, Eurocentric knowledge, indigenous knowledge, social research, social work education.

INTRODUCTION

Long before the dawn of colonialism in Nigeria and other African countries, there was a communal belief system in various communities that was grounded in the African *Ubuntu*; *"you are because I am"*(Amadasun, 2020c; Anucha, 2008; Ekpe & Mamah 1998; Mungai 2015; Munyaradzi, 2015; Shokane&Massoga, 2018; Ugiagbe. 2015). This belief system was built on strong institutional framework for mobilizing, administering and coordinating various forms of assistance to the poor,

and vulnerable members of the society (Akintayo et al, 2017; Okoye 2014a). Despite Nigeria being a multicultural society, there were in existence indigenous practices that were respected and tolerated to allow for the coexistence of different educational frameworks within culturally diverse settings. Indigenous practices around childcare, rites of passage, coronation ceremony, traditional conflict resolution, marriage ceremony, cultural festivals and the likes were built on communal ideologies and value system known to all community members. Communal ideologies in pre-colonial Nigeria were grounded in a web of social formation which was passed from one generation to another through oral tradition and social network channels (Anene & Njoku, 2018; Ani et al., 2021; Olowolafe et al., 2020; Okoye 2012). This enabled an exchange of indigenous knowledge, respect for cultural diversities and social cohesion in pre-colonial Nigeria.

Pre-colonial social service in Nigeria

The Nigerian 'social services' system pre-colonialism and pre-social work was characterized by a communal social service system and web of communal social structures that saw everyone as his brother's keeper. Communal social services existed among various ethnic communities before colonization and formal social work education in Nigeria (Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2014; Akintayo et al, 2017; Amadasun, 2020; Ekpe &Mamah, 1987; Mbah et al., 2018; Okoye 2013). For instance, whilst the Islamic *Zakat* system in northern Nigeria provided a form of support services for persons with disabilities, vulnerable street children and the destitute, the strong kinship system in southern Nigeria provided and promoted a social security network for its members through a communal lifestyle that was sustainable over time (Mbah et al., 2018; Nnama-Okechukwu et al, 2020; Olaore & Drolet, 2016; Okoye, 2014b). According to Okoye (2014b), the extended family through the kinship system was the main institution of social service intervention saddled with the responsibility of social welfare provision and assessment.

Various family-based alternative childcare arrangements existed to address challenges around maternal death, childlessness and parental inability toward child care. For instance, placement of foster children by the extended family members in households of foster parents who are childless was seen an important exchange between members of a kin group; it was also seen as a vital expression of strong social bond and social stability. Such traditional practice was passed on from one generation to another by means of informal socialization process and communal living arrangements.

Care for the elderly was family-based rather than institutional and such was undertaken by the extended family that shared a common belief that elders are the custodian of indigenous knowledge and thus need to be cared for in a family-environment for the propagation of the legacy of the family (Ebimgbo et al., 2019; Ebimgbo et al., 2021; Okoye, 2012; Okoye 2013). A common practice in pre-colonial Nigeria communities is the fostering of children by elderly persons as a form of social security at old age and socialization process for the younger generation. Households with elderly persons foster children so that such children can in turn support them when they are aged and can no longer care for themselves. This indigenous practice was acceptable and prevalent in various communities and undertaken due to cultural expectations, need and mutual respect for the elderly (Nwokocha& Michael, 2015;Olaore&Drolet, 2016; Ebimgbo et al., 2021).

In pre-colonial Nigeria, community development was both a voluntarily and collective action in the interest of the community and conflict management was negotiated by constituted political structures resident in each community (Ani et al., 2021). Elders and kinsmen within a community were expected to resolve conflicts in fairness and equity because it is believed that "you are because I am" and therefore we must be our brother's keeper' and learn to be forbearing. Indigenous practices in pre-colonial Nigeria were communicated through indigenous language that

is known to all members of a given community without any form of interpretation in an alien language. Indigenous practices and education thus provided an important framework through which indigenous communities' functioned and cultures thrived. Though there was no formal social worker and services akin to those subsequently provided by social worker, informal social work services was embedded in all facets of communal living. Social work services during these times was neither professionalized nor acquired in any formal social work educational institution. It was rather transmitted from one generation to another informally through the means of oral tradition with the extended family system serving as the informal educational institution. Mbah et al., (2018) clearly identified that:

> Indigenous social work practice has been in existence in Nigeria prior to the advent of colonialism…Social work was not just practiced as an independent profession by a group of trained professionals as we have today, but was a value system imbibed by all. There were responsibilities allocated to every member of the society, thereby making everyone an informal social worker (pp 1-2).

The advent of colonialism and collapse of communal social services

From a historical perspective, social work education in Nigeria emerged from a colonial heritage established by colonial administrators. In Nigeria's case, the colonial administrators were the British colonial government who through the activities of Christian missionaries arrived with their own basic assumption of social services that was based on European ideology of individuality and formal social welfare legislations. This was seen in the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886 and other social welfare legislation that brought about a disconnect between the traditional communal system as important replaced by a Western system of individuality rather than the erstwhile communal living practice (Ekpe &Mamah, 1997). However commendable the activities of the

colonial administrators including the introduction of western education, improved health care system and social development programmes they did undermine traditional ways of caring for the vulnerable and the poor.

Earlier reports suggest that colonial administrators replaced traditional cultures with Western culture which they believed was better 'refined' than the customs of indigenous people (Aye, 1967; Rodney, 1972; Berman, 1975; Ekpe &Mamah, 1997). This replacement silenced and undermined traditional customs, broke up the extended family, promoted individualism and excluded ingenious knowledge in the educational curriculum (Rodney, 1972). According to Rodney (1972:293) "colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment". The colonial administrators promoted Western theories, concepts and knowledge into social development effort at the expense of indigenous theories, practices and knowledges in social development programmes in Nigeria.

At the onset of colonial government in Nigeria, the colonial administrators were instrumental in the introduction of formal social work services and education in Nigeria. The colonial administrators that introduced formal social work services were however at odds over the place of indigenous knowledge. beliefs and customs and thus made a frontal attack on the beliefs, customs and work of indigenous people (Ekpe &Mamah, 1997).With social welfare activities and legal frameworks established during the colonial period to address emerging social problems, little scientific evidence was available to ensure that services were compatible with the need of indigenous people. Though there were formal social work services undertaken by untrained social work professionals in colonial Nigeria, services provided were patterned after the models of Western culture which supported individualized services rather than the communal services prevalent in pre-colonial Nigeria. For example, institutional child care arrangements were

introduced as an alternative child care arrangement for vulnerable children; white weddings were introduced replacing traditional marriage rites peculiar to different communities, traditional means of conflict resolution were replaced by a formal legal system, cultural activities that promoted communal solidarity and indigenous practices were ingeniously downgraded with the spread of Christian missionaries (Ajaji, 1965).

The emergency of formal social work education in Nigeria

Formal social work education in Nigeria began in the 1940s following increasing social problems created by the Second World War (Amasadun, 2020c; Jaja, 2013). Increasing social problem according to Anucha (2008) created opportunity for the importation of social workers from the West to act as agent of social control. Services of Western social workers then were to address challenges around child vulnerability, delinquency, destitution, disabilities, prostitution and similar issues. Services provided by social workers from the West were however not tailored to meet social development problems but were more akin to social service delivery in the West which according to Amadasun (2020c).was the rational for the importation of social workers from the West. Individuality rather than collectivism was emphasized in service delivery during the colonial era. Aside the disparity in service delivery, the colonial government "did nothing as regards professionalizing social work before independence" (Ekpe &Mamah, 1997:81).

After independence, the Nigerian government recognized the disparity in the National Action Plan (1960) that identified the need for a social development programme given the social problems at that early stage of national development. Proactive actions were however not taken to address challenges in different sectors including the educational sector (Mbah et al., 2018). In the process of time, Western theories were inculcated into the Nigerian educational system with little attention given to the development and inculcation of indigenous knowledge. This integration of

Western theories has also been reported in the African social work education literature resulting in ethical conflict between Western values and traditional African indigenous knowledge (Akintayo et al, 2017; Gray et al, 2014, Gray, 2008; Mbah et al., 2018).

Currently social work education in Nigeria remains dominated with Western ideologies. Some Nigerian scholars however recognize the need to promote the inclusion of indigenous knowledges in social work education in Nigeria for a more blended teaching and practice methodology considering the multicultural and ethnic diversities of the Nigerian nation (Anucha, 2008; Amadasun, 2019; Amadasun 2020c; Onalu& Okoye, 2020). Within the Nigerian context, social work education and practice is still faced with the problem of addressing the increasing social problems of the multicultural and ethnic diversities in the differing geopolitical regions. It is therefore vital for social work education to be relevant in and to the Nigerian context by recognizing the specific needs of communities, groups and individuals from different ethnic orientation and cultural diversity.

In Nigeria there are over 250 ethnic groups; including the major ethnic groups; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, other minority ethnic groups' including: Ijaw, Ibibio, Kwali, Igala, Tivs, Kanuri, Urobo, and Urohob. These ethnic groups have varying cultural practices and indigenous knowledges that social work educators, social work practitioners and student social workers within the Nigerian community ought to be aware of. More worrisome is that varying cultural orientations and indigenous knowledges of these ethnic groups are not represented in the present social work curricula in Nigeria.With the rising incident of killing by Fulani herdsmen (Wisdom, 2018) and agitation for cessation by some ethnic groups in Nigeria who allege marginalization (Fenske&Zurimendi, 2017; Oyeibor, 2016), the need for inclusion of indigenous knowledges into social work curricula now plays a significant role in the academia.

Exploratory research on indigenous knowledge in social work in Nigeria

There are vast social work studies in Nigeria and Africa that have brought to the public domain indigenous knowledge on elderly care, alternative child care, management of pandemic, and environmental sustainability (Amadasun, 2020a; Ebimgbo et al., 2021;Magosa &Shokane, 2019; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2020: Nnama-Okechukwu& Okoye 2019; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2018; Okoye, 2012; Okoye, 2013 Okoye &Agwu, 2019;Olaore&Drolet, 2016; Spitzer, 2019; Spitzer &Twikirize, 2019). More indigenous knowledge is however still needed in the curriculum of social work education in Africa to ensure the transfer from one generation to another through oral, spiritual, practical, visual and recorded means (Magosa,2017;Shara and Manyike,2018). Such transference makes visible the difference between African ontology and Western ideologies in the education of social work in African.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity isessential in social work education and practice as it provides the means by which cultural practices are known and enhanced. Cultural sensitivity and awareness of indigenous knowledges are however not in the public domain as social work education and practice in Nigeria is still primarily under the influence of Western colonialism and hegemony. In order to explore the use of ingenious knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria, a qualitative research project was established. The overarching research question of the project was "Is indigenous knowledge and evidence-based research fundamental to the development of social work education in Nigeria? Other research questions are: (i) why interrogate Western knowledge in the curriculum of social work education in Nigeria? (ii) What innovative approaches can social work education in Nigeria adopt to increase the visibility of indigenous knowledge in Africa and other clime?

Material and method
Study area

The study was located in University of Nigeria, in Nsukka LGA which is in the Northern part of Enugu State. Enugu state is in the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The University of Nigeria is recognized as the first fully-fledged indigenous university and technically became the first university of Nigeria. The University provides social work courses at the undergraduate and post graduate levels.

Sampling procedure

A phenomenological qualitative research design methodology was used which followed a descriptive and explorative design based on the day-to-day experiences of people (Crossman, 2020; Kalof, Dan & Dietz, 2008). According to Crossman (2020), the purpose of qualitative sampling is to explain, describe and interpret a phenomenon among a subset of the population. Participants for the study were made up of 10 social work students, 4 social work educators and 4 social work practitioners. The study adopted a purposive sampling strategy in the selection of female and male students who were in their third and final year at the University of Nigeria Nsukka for in-depth interview [IDI].Purposive sampling was selected as it allowed the researcher to recruit participants with the required characteristics needed for the study asthe strength and usefulness of qualitative research is in the quality of respondents that are recruited (Robinson, 2014; Saunders et al, 2018, Vasileiou et al, 2018).

Undergraduate social work students in their third and final years were considered eligible for the study if they had studied social work throughout their University course. Undergraduate students who joined the social work course in their second year of studies were not eligible to participate in the study. Duration was considered important to identify "cases of change of course" and those not offering a four years programme in the department. Critical incident sampling was used to select four social work practitioners from four different states in Nigeria for key in-depth

interview [KII]. Critical incident sampling is useful in generating hypothesis and assumptions about social work practice effectiveness (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). One way to apply critical sampling technique according to Rubin and Babbie, (2008), is to ask direct-service practitioners in public and the private sector to identify cases that in their judgment can be regarded as successful or unsuccessful. Critical sampling technique was used in this present study to select experienced social work practitioners from the public and private sectors who had managed many cases in their agencies. This enabled the researchers to probe further based on case examples on their use of western and indigenous knowledge in case management. This was undertaken to understand how social work intervention, with either indigenous or western knowledge, have helped to improve social work practice and education in Nigeria.. Purposive sampling was also used to select four social work educators from the University of Nigeria Nsukka that have spent at least three years teaching social work courses.

Data collection

A semi-structured interview guide with probes was used to collect data with the help of two research assistants. Discussion with social work students and educators was held in different locations based on participants' recommendation and what was available. For social work practitioners, initial contact was made to establish their willingness to participate in the study after which interview was conducted via mobile phone. All interviews were carried out with the voluntary consent of participants and anonymity was assured to all study participants who received a personal information sheet sent to their emails to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Ethical approval for the study was given by the Ethical Review Board of the University of Nigeria Nsukka

Data analysis

The research assistants recorded the responses using audiotape. All discussions lasted for approximately 55 minutes to avoid fatigue. All interviews were carried out with the voluntary consent of participants and anonymity was assured to all study participants. The interpretative phenomenological approach (Kalof et al.,, 2008) to qualitative research was used to analysis research findings. We considered this approach suitable for the analysis it allowed us to treat social action and human activity as quotes and text excerpts rather than numbers. In other words, discussions with study participants and their views on the study topics were seen as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning which were eventually transcribed into written text. Secondly, this approach gave usthe opportunity to discuss research findings in themes based on research objectives as responses were first transcribed intoEnglish and coded into a set of collectively designed thematic frames. The transcribed discussions were compared with the recorded discussions by one of the researchers that took notes during the discussion. This was to ensure that the original meaning of what the participants said was retained and it also helped to validate views as well as made the data more reliable (Kalof et al, 2008).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristic of study participants

Socio demographic features	Frequency	Percentage
Student social workers		
Gender		
Males	5	50
Female	5	50
Total	**10**	**100**
Level of study		
400 level	6	60
300 level	4	20
Total	**10**	**100**
Social work practitioners		
Gender		
Males	2	50
Female	2	50

	4	100
Total	**4**	**100**
Age		
30-39years	1	25
40-49years	3	75
Total	**4**	**100**
Designation		
Social worker/Social development officer	1	25
Child protection officer	1	25
Social welfare officer	1	25
Youth care coordinator	1	25
Total	**4**	**100**
Social Work Educators		
Gender		
Males	2	50
Females	2	50
Total	**2**	**100**
Age		
25-35	2	50
36+	2	50
Total	**4**	**100**

Source: Field data 2021

Table 1 describes the socio-demographic of study participants showing that there are a total of 10 undergraduate students (5 males and 5 males). Six of the undergraduate students are in 400 levels while four are in their third year. A total of four social work practitioner (2 males and 2 females) who are aged between 30 years to 49 years participated in the study. Four social work educators from the department of social work, university of Nigeria participated in the study.

Results from the study

Findings from the study are presented in two themes (a & b) based on two research questions for the study and a theme (c) that emerged during the study. These themes are: (a) indigenous knowledge and evidence-based research in social work education(b) Interrogating Western and

indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria (c) Innovative approaches for the propagation of indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria

(a)Indigenous knowledge and evidence-based research in social work education

Findings from majority (12 out of 18) of the study participants revealed that the concept of indigenous knowledge and evidence-based research are well known to participants. For instance, a practitioner defined indigenous knowledge as:

> …local knowledge that is used by members of a defined community to solve their needs and…it also refers to the skills and philosophies developed by a community or society that have interacted with natural environment and become acceptable. Indigenous knowledge informs decision making about fundamental aspect of day-to-day life of a people **[Social work practitioner]**

Most participants (12 out of 18) in trying to explain indigenous knowledge suggested that every society has a different story and value system which defines them and their cultural practice. Even in the presence of common cultural values, there are contextual local values and nuances peculiar to a particular group of people. People from different areas thus strive to preserve and advance their cultural values and ideologies in order to promote their identity and preserve their culture. Study participants who are practitioners felt that the advancement of Western knowledge and ideologies in social work curriculum in Nigeria cannot address these local values and issues.

A participant suggested: "it is very vital that social work education embraces an academic curriculum that reflects local and regional culture in Africa as this is what makes us "who we are". Western knowledge according to most study participants (13 out of 18) will never be a perfect substitute for indigenous knowledge. A social work student was of the view that:

…Western knowledge is knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of Westerners which does not reflect our different identities and cultural heritage in Nigeria and Africa given our multi-ethnic groups… that is why we need to pay more attention to our cultural heritage in research and this should be projected in social work education [**Social work student]**

Evidence-based research was seen by most social work educators and practitioners as research rooted in objectivity which deals with lived experiences of people:

It is not solely on feelings, opinions or intuition, but on practical, reasonable and empirical investigation. Well, evidence-based research can help in exploring the state of indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria; its effects and consequences; and also how best to improve the status quo. It can also help us cherish our cultural heritage **(Social work educator)**

In trying to explain the need for evidence-based research in the promotion of indigenous knowledge, a participant explained thus:

…evidence based research means that it is practical, reasonable and based on empirical investigation. Evidence-based research can help in exploring the state of indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria; its effects and consequences; and also how best to improve the status quo. It can also help us cherish our cultural heritage and make them more visible in publication, conferences and workshops…we must however understand that not all indigenous knowledges are good for propagation…like some harmful cultural practices…Female genital mutilation, stigmatization of persons with disability, widowhood practices, the osucast systems…many of them.**[Social work educator]**

It was generally agreed that all indigenous knowledge should be validated in social work education in Nigeria through research. According to study participants this would generate evidence for either inclusion or exclusion by way of engaging on discussion toward understanding reasons behind the practice. Through such processes relevant stakeholders could be engage in addressing challenges with some of the 'harmful' cultural practices based on research evidence. Students and social work educators pointed out the many challenges with carrying out social research in Nigeria related to indigenous knowledge. A social work student explained: "who will support you in carrying out research to even know about indigenous knowledges in Nigeria? The government will not support…you will still be running about grants from Western countries…to study our own indigenous knowledge!"

(b) Interrogating Western and indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria

Findings from the study revealed that the emphasis placed on Western knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria was seen by social work practitioners and social work students as a disruption in the propagation of indigenous knowledge. Social work students felt that the propagation of Western knowledge in social work education in Nigeria is constantly undermining indigenous knowledge which is viewed as inferior or of littleimportance.

A major challenge to social work education in Nigeria, according all student participants, was the social work curriculum which lacked an indigenous background: "most of the issues addressed are based on western orientation which lack the rudiment required to tackle social problem in the Nigeria realities". The theories, skills and perspective used in social work according to student participants do not have a Nigeria origin and do not provide students with the knowledge needed to be culturally sensitive in the Nigerian multicultural context. Propagation of Western knowledge and theories according to some social work practitioners discourages research on

ingenious knowledge thereby leading to a continuous neglect and abandonment of local knowledges.

Social work practitioners said their personal experience of what they learned in the classroom during their training as social workers was different from what they saw in the field after their graduation. The emphasis placed on Western knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria was argued by some social work practitioners and social work students as inhibiting the propagation of indigenous knowledge.

We are not supported to carry out research in this country; the grant is not there, when we even do research, it is more of something that will not promote our indigenous knowledge...yes it is more of something that will promote the Western methodology… the person providing the grant will dictate how the research will go…well a few grants support research on indigenous knowledge…if we truly want social work to be made in Nigeria, then our government must be ready to support us… (**Social work practitioner)**

The social work practitioners also identified a mismatch btween what was taught on their course and their experience of pactice:

…it is not easy to practice as a social worker here I must tell you…you keep trying to bend Western theories and models to suit your intervention plans… you end up doing the wrong the thing and the problem is still there. **(Social work practitioner)**

Study participants felt that while recognizing the contribution of Western theories and practices that have shaped social work development and practice in Africa, it would also be expedient to promote local knowledge in the practice of social work; "it is becoming important that we start thinking of creating niche for ourselves by promoting indigenous knowledge in our social work education". A practitioner reflected: "While knowledge transfer across culture may have helped in

addressing challenges in different fields, it is beginning to be glaring the many challenges that demands indigenous knowledge and research to tackle".

(c)Innovative approaches for the propagation of indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria

A theme emerged during the discussion which identified various innovative approaches that could increase the propagation and visibility of indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria: "there is need for us to rethink field work placement in this department and develop some more innovative strategies…like assigning student social workers to communities and agencies within their locality during vocation…they will research on indigenous knowledge" For another social work student:

> …we should be able to acquire information and understand our indigenous activities through research not sitting down in the classroom. … We are not exposed to knowledge on ethnicity and cultural diversity. The truth is that we don't have deep knowledge of these courses…we don't even have textbooks written by Nigerian authors...only a few local textbooks in social work and they are not even exhaustive like Western textbooks. The Western knowledge is more evident in our curriculum … **(Student social worker)**

Student participants and practitioners felt that to integrate indigenous knowledge into social work education in Nigeria, it is important to explore the placement of student social workers in communities where they can learn and appreciate local knowledge and problem solving techniques of indigenous people.

The view of social work educators however differed as most of them (3 out of 4) strongly believed that a synergy is needed to integrate indigenous and Western knowledge into social work education whereby student'slearn more about their culture as well as other people's cultures:

> We don't learn in isolation and we don't also practice in isolation… today we are talking about international social work and our students need to understand what this is all about…both knowledges are important in social work curriculum in Nigeria (**Social work educator).**

The need for local and international conferences webinars/workshops was also identified by social work educators as a medium through which academic discourse can be stimulated and advanced on the need for co-existence of indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge:

> We need to organize more local conference in Nigeria and invite international participants where we can share some of our indigenous knowledges for the purpose of inclusion or further interrogation on its relevance in social work academic curricula in Nigeria and even Africa**(Social work educator).**

This view was also supported by social work practitioners who decried the low level of academic discourse on social work issues by social work educators in Nigeria. According to a social work practitioner:

> Social work educators in Nigeria and even Africa need to be proactive in conducting capacity building programme such as conferences, workshops, symposiums and seminars where indigenous knowledges from research and student field experiences can be shared with other professional colleagues and associations (**Social work practitioner/Delta).**

Academic conferences according to most practitioners and all social work educators would help raise awareness of the importance of indigenous knowledge in social work-in Nigeria.

Two social work educators believed that the present social work curriculum was developed to include local contents in the teaching of social work even though there is need for adjustment from time to time based on changes occurring in the society and our immediate environment. A student while citing challenges with creating awareness on the covid-19 pandemic explained that most student social workers don't know how to educate the public on the preventive measures for covid-19 because they can't speak their local language. "You wouldn't believe that English language is even a problem when you talk about how we relate with our clients during field work". A student social worker suggested that more of local languages should be used in classroom teaching; this suggestion was however refuted by three other social work students who felt that this will not work in the Nigeria context where there is so many multiethnic groups and languages. The majority of student social workers however agreed that there is need to explore community field work placements to give students an opportunity of interacting with people from different socio-cultural background. A community field work option was supported by two social work practitioners who see this as important in unearthing various forms of indigenous knowledges and promoting social cohesion. As one of them explained it:

> I am of the opinion that social work field practice should be done in such a way that students are posted to communities in their localities just like the National Youth Services Scheme…they can spend one semester in the field… first it will give them opportunity to interact in their local language as well as engage with agencies and people in the community. It will help student ask question about certain cultural practices and then come back to share their experiences in the classroom after their field work community engagement…other students and social work educators can also learn from this experience and this can promote social cohesion **(Social work practitioner)**

Other study participants also suggested the need for social workers to be active in government social development programmes and policy which was believed will enhance the visibility of indigenous knowledge in social work education. Social welfare agencies were also highlighted by some participants as they felt that the social welfare agencies in Nigeria are prominent for handling cases pertaining to the family and society. However, social welfare agencies in Nigeria, according to most study participants, werewithout professional social worker and hence the need for placing social work student to these agencies for field practicum.

> We should be thinking more innovative means of doing field work in the university apart from what we are already used to…we should send more students social workers to social welfare department in various communities across Nigeria for their field work so that they learn indigenous practices. We have many social welfare officers who are not social workers and don't even know how to intervene in cases; that is why we are having problem in the social welfare department in Nigeria…I suggest that all universities offering social work in Nigeria begin to think onfield placement at the social welfare agency for student social workers…when our students see what is happening there, they will questions the system and I tell you, change will come**[Social work practitioner]**

Discussion

Findings from this study are revelatory as it suggests that social work education in Nigeria is largely dominated by Eurocentric knowledge and theories. This has led to a one-sided narrative where Eurocentric ideologies are advanced and indigenous knowledges often sidelined in academic curricula. This non-inclusive teaching and learning methodology acts as a continuous (re)colonization process where knowledge from Europe is imported and planted in the Nigerian academy. This study's findings also show that while the integration of Western ideologies and

theories have helped in the development of social work education in Nigeria, it has led to the loss of and downgrading of indigenous knowledges. Indigenous knowledges need to be made more transparent in social work curriculum in Nigeria to avoid a one-sided narrative. Indigenous and Western knowledges thus need to be blended in the social work curriculum in Nigeria to ensure a 'both and' rather than an 'either or' situation.

Western ideologies and theories in social work curriculum as found from the study do not address the importance of indigenous knowledges as a valid lens for understanding the world through the perspective of local people. As a social work educator claimed:

> We appreciate what we have more if we take the time to know their values…the benefit of this narrative is to encourage the use of home-grown theories and method through evidence research that will showcase indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria…this will even help us in addressing our local challenges rather than depend on Western theories and methods**(Social work educator).**

Social work scholars in Nigeria have affirmed that indigenous knowledge and research is a growing theme in the literature and attempts to move away from the use of inappropriate Western models in the teaching and application of social work practice (Anucha, 2008; Amadasun, 2020; Hochfeld et al., 2009: Mangi, 2017). Encouraging the development of indigenous theories, models and framework via research and academic discourse will promote sustainable intervention that will address the peculiarity of social work education in Nigeria.

Social work education in Nigeria needs to be contextually oriented. This implies that theories and models that come with indigenous education and practice ought to be visible in the curriculum of social work in Nigeria. Rather than merely depending on Western theories and models, scholars in social work education in Nigeria have a duty to engage in critically

interrogating the dominance of Western ideologies in the teaching of social work education in African and Nigeria. Western textbooks are still largely used in social work education in Nigeria and this continuous usage further sidelines indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, teaching methodologies and examples are still Western dominated as a lot of emphasis is still being placed on the history of social work in Europe rather than the history of social work in Africa.

Conclusions

It is important to promote indigenous knowledges in the education of social workers in Nigeria and Africa, as Twikirize (2019),notes an uncritical acceptance of indigenous practice that perpetuates violence, oppression and vulnerability must be challenged and discouraged .Such inclusion or exclusion will advance Afro-centric frameworks, theories and philosophies in curriculum of social work education whilst also recognizing the benefits of certain Eurocentric practice-based approaches.

It is therefore expedient that African values, Nigeria cultural practices and indigenous knowledges be conspicuous in social work curriculum. It will query the dominance and appropriateness of Eurocentric philosophies, theories and framework in the curriculum creating room for greater critical discourse on the need for co-existence of both knowledges (Spitzer, 2019; Twikirize& Spitzer, 2019).

Nigeria is a multicultural society and each ethnic group has its own indigenous knowledge. It is therefore important for student social workers at the preparatory state of their social work education to explore more about indigenous knowledges and be culturally sensitive of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Such experience can help student social workers become more effective social work practitioners. Currently at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, undergraduate student social workers engage in field practicum twice every week where they visit agencies within and

outside the university community. The current approach however limits students to contact with one ethnic group for the period of their four years programme. The findings of this study however suggest that social work field practicum based on the current realities in the Nigeria state should look beyond the normal field practicum within and outside the university community. Embracing a more diverse field practicum approach that will require assigning students to different ethnic communities to experience thereality and the indigenous knowledge of various ethnic groups. This new approach could help to improve practice as students would be exposed to more indigenous knowledges.

It was evident from research findings that indigenous and Western knowledge need to be harmonized in the present social work curriculum at the University of Nigeria Nsukka to promote social justice. Social justice for social work education in Nigeria will start from decolonization and promotion of indigenous knowledge alongside Western knowledge. Though these two knowledges have their different perspectives, it is important to propagate both knowledges in the teaching of social work education in Nigeria with greater emphasis placed on indigenous knowledges.

Indigenous knowledge has in recent times been acknowledged by some African scholars as important to social work education as it is more effective in providing sustainable solutions to the myriad of social problems in the continent (Amadasun, 2019; Amadasun, 2020a; Amadasun, 2020b; Anucha, 2008; Gray, 2016: Okoye, 2014a: Okoye 2014b; Masoga&Shokane, 2019; Spitzer &Twikirize, 2014;Twikirize& Spitzer, 2019). According to Twikirize and Spitzer, (2019: p. 2), "the process of developing indigenous knowledges and cultural competence cannot first start with practice but with research and education then aim to integrate these knowledges and practice into the mainstream, teach them in classroom and competently apply them in practice". Mclaughlin and Teater (2017) noted that "the need for social workers to use research and implement evidence-

informed practice is recognized internationally (p...6).Social work scholars in Nigeria are beginning to see the need for more evidence-based/informed research as a mean of creating awareness on various social issues and indigenous knowledge (Amasadun, 2020a;Amasadun, 2020b; Ebimgbo et al., 2021; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2020a; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2020b; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2020c; Nnama-Okechukwu et al., 2020d; Odo et al., 2021)

Findings from this study suggest that the common understanding of indigenous knowledge is the knowledge based on people's way of life which overtime has provided them with the awareness of problem solving techniques. It is this awareness which had helped them to survive and develop sustainable means to coping capacity and problem solving (Amadasun, 2020a; Onlau & Okoye, 2021; Nnama-Okechukwu & Erhumwunse 2021; Spitzer &Twikiriz, 2019). Findings from this study revealed that having social work education in Nigeria that is grounded in a people, their place and their history will help in effective interventions. This can be a way of decolonizing social work education in Nigeria through pushing local content into the wider international dialogue. According to a social work practitioner:

> When our social work education in Nigeria promotes research, we can actually come up with more home grown theories, models or even perspective. By this, we can integrate such into our teaching and practice method. Our students can now use our own local approaches to the practice of social work and reconnect with international social work making social work education more of a made in Nigeria product **(Social work practitioner).**

For a more blended teaching methodology, many social work scholars in Nigeria have continued to advocate for a social work education that will take into cognizance Western and indigenous practice knowledges for a more sustainable development in dealing with Nigeria challenges of social development (Anucha, 2008; Amadasun, 2019; Okoye &Onalu, 2021;

Onokerhoraye, 2011). Indigenous knowledges providethe means by which the propagation of Western knowledge can be interrogated in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria for a more sustainable social development effort. Western-based intervention programmes and projects are often developed and implemented for the purpose of eliminating poverty, addressing women's empowerment, gender equality, youth empowerment, alternative child care etc. Good as they are, these programs do not usually take into consideration the local realities or adapt the content to suit Nigerian citizens (Mungai, 2015; Shokane & Masoga, 2018).

Findings from this study represent the views of few social work educators, practitioners and student social workers from the University of Nigeria. The views of others who did not participate in the study were not heard. We therefore cannot generalize our finding to the larger population. With a higher sample size, findings may vary. A national study is recommended on innovative field work practicums that can promote effective indigenous knowledges in social work education in Nigeria.

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