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Indigenous knowledge and social work education in Nigeria: Challenges and need for sustainable development

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Abstract

Social work education in Africa is faced with myriad of challenges that requires immediate attention for a sustainable future. If the principles of social justice, human rights and respect for diversities are central to social work profession, then the education and practice of social work in Nigeria should be culturally relevant in engaging people and structures to address challenges. Participants for the study included 4 social work educators, 10 social work students and 4 social work practitioners. Findings from the research suggest the need for a paradigm shift from Western pedagogy to a more inclusive Nigerian pedagogy for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Colonization, indigenous knowledge, Nigeria, indigenization, social work education, sustainable development goals.

Introduction

The clarion call for indigenous knowledges through research became central to academic discourses in the wake of the landmark global knowledge conference of 1997 in Toronto which emphasized the urgent need to learn, preserve and exchange indigenous knowledges (Munyaradzi, 2015). In Africa, social work educators had as far back as the 1970s called for the need to make social work education more responsive to the development context and agenda in Africa. This call recognizes the needs of individual, groups and communities within the African continent to use indigenous knowledges and culturally informed interventions in advancing social work for sustainable development (Spitzer, 2019; Spitzer and Twikiriz, 2019; Twikiriz and Spitzer, 2019). This call has further being strengthened by various academic discourses in the African continent through the 2018 Professional Social Work in East Africa [PROSOWO] conference in Kigali-Rwanda and the earlier 2017 conference held in Bokborge-South Africa on “Rethinking social work in Africa: Decoloniality and indigenous knowledge in education and practice”. Both conferences emphasized the need to learn, preserve and amplify indigenous knowledges through sustained calls to liberate social work education and practice in Africa from Western dominated resources and pedagogy.

To develop this the Association for Social Work Education in Africa [ASWEA], seeks to liberate African social work education and practice from its Western orientation by promoting indigenization discourses for social work educators in Africa. ASWEA promotes this through conferences and regional workshops and has continued to advocate for the need to reposition social work education in African countries to promote the wealth of indigenous knowledges and African philosophical principles. According to Jongman (2021), social work education in Africa needs decolonization to rewrite and promote writing by telling the African narratives that could help to

reconnect Anglophone, Francophone and Portuguese knowledges regarding social work education in Africa. Various countries in Africa have also taken up the call for the promotion of indigenous knowledge in social work education given the Sustainable Development Goals [SDG] agenda of “leaves no one behind”. Despite these calls, little has been done with regards to integrating indigenous knowledge into social work education in Africa due to the daunting challenges confronting social work education in Africa.

Challenges facing social work education in Africa

There are many daunting challenges confronting social work education in different parts of Africa. These challenges include: a lack of acknowledgement and professionalization of social work by act of parliament in most African countries (Amadasun, 2019; Amadasun, 2020a; Amadasun, 2020b; Kakowa, 2016; Mwansa, 2010; Okoye, 2013), an over dominance of Western theories and philosophies in social work curricula in Africa (Mwansa, 2010; Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo, 2008; Nnama-Okechukwu and McLaughlin, 2022; Spitzer, 2019; Spitzer and Twikirize, 2019; Smith, 2014), exclusion of social workers in social policy and development programmes in Africa (Amadasun, 2020a; Kakowa, 2016; Ugiagbe, 2015), lack of public awareness of the social work role in the African society, a dearth of research on indigenous knowledges (Mangi, 2017; Okoye 2014), lingering problems of conducting social research in Africa and poor utilization of research findings in problem solving in Africa (Amadasun, 2019; Amadasun, 2020a; Amadasun, 2020b; Anucha, 2008; Kreitzer, 2014).

Another key challenge of social work education in Africa is student field work placements as social work educators in Africa e.g. Botswana, Malawi, Nigeria and South Africa are dependent on Western textbooks due to the lack of indigenous teaching materials. This results in a one-sided narrative where Western ideologies (Western ideology in the context of this study refers to Western

methodology, philosophy and beliefs on social work education) are advanced and indigenous knowledges become sidelined in academic curricula. There is also the pressure to train African social work graduate to fit into the global market based on demand for social workers across the globe in the 21st century. Findings based on the experiences of social work educators over the years remains that if social work graduates from Africa are unable to share their indigenous knowledges with colleagues in other continents, then, social work education in Africa needs to reconsider its social work curricula.

These identified challenges continue to generate argument for and against the integration of indigenous knowledges into social work curricula in Africa. Some African scholars are however assert that social work is a practice-based profession with principles and goals that are universal and therefore should be rightly applied (Amadasun, 2020a; Spitzer and Twikiriz, 2019).

Social justice and social work education in Africa

It is certainly true that social work is a practice-based profession as the International Federation of Social Work [IFSW] and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014) affirmed that:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (p. 19).

Being practice-based therefore means the teaching and practice of social work in Africa should be culturally relevant through the adoption and application of indigenous knowledges, theories and philosophy in the curriculum of social work education. If the principles of social justice, human rights and respect for diversities are central to social work profession, it therefore means that the education and practice of social work in Africa should be culturally relevant and effective in engaging people and structures to address challenges impeding the development of social work education in Africa.

The integration of indigenous knowledges into social work education in Africa provides the means by which the propagation of Western knowledge can be interrogated in the teaching and practice of social work in Africa. This is premised on the need to decolonize social work practice in Africa and develop more effective home-grown methods and theories that could address local problems for a more sustainable teaching and practice of social work in the region. It is obvious that Western-based intervention programmes and projects are often developed and implemented for the purpose of eliminating poverty, addressing gender equality or alternative child care. Good as they are, these programmes rarely take into consideration African realities or adapt their content to suit indigenous people (Mungai, 2015; Shokane and Masoga, 2018).

Social work educators in Africa are aware that the development of social work education in most tertiary institutions in Africa is largely dominated by Western knowledge, theories, and ideologies. This is visible in the number of foreign textbooks used in the teaching of social work education in tertiary institutions across Africa. Local textbooks written by African authors are often limited and not in wider circulation leading to the demand and use of foreign text books often written by Western authors. The reliance on foreign textbooks thus enforces Western perspectives on the teaching of social work education in Africa. Unsurprisingly social work educators in Africa

rely on these texts for their course outlines which they subsequently teach to their students. The dependence on foreign textbooks thus enforces Western knowledge on the teaching of social work in Africa. The same also applies to the practice of social work in both public and private social work agencies in Africa where intervention strategies are more likely to be Western based than home-grown interventions (Anucha, 2008).

The dominance of Western teaching materials often implies that student social workers and practitioners must connect to the knowledge base of social work using Western perspectives at the expense of their own indigenous knowledge base. This approach unconsciously portrays indigenous knowledges as second-class in the African social work academy. This leads to the invisibility of indigenous knowledges and an uncritical acceptance of Western knowledges and philosophies (Mwansa, 2010; Shokane and Masoga, 2018). This has led to the failure of social work education in Africa to articulate local knowledges, theories and intervention strategies for sustainable development in the academy of social work in Africa. Dei (2000) stated that:

The goal of integrating indigenous knowledge in the academy is to affirm the collaborative dimension of knowledge and, at the same time to address the emerging call for academic knowledge to speak to the diversity of histories, event, experience and ideas that have shaped human growth and development. (p.113)

The challenge from Dei (2000) is far from being achieved in Africa as there remains a dominance of Western theories and philosophies in the teaching and practice of social work.

The concept of indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge in the context of this paper refers to the cultural heritage and histories of peoples that defines who they are and what the social world means to them. It is knowledge that is locally generated within a community or communities' that takes into cognizance their coping

strategies, problem solving methods, survival strategies and resilience nature. Indigenous knowledge also takes into account cultural practices, values and skills that people within a geographic location ascribes to events around them which consequently defines their everyday social interaction within and outside their environment (Magni, 2017; Pearson, 2017; Smith, 2014; Spitzer and Twikiriz, 2019; Warren, 1991). This is supported by the Afro-sensed theory and the indigenization theory that is recognized for its uniqueness on indigenous knowledge and cultural approach to problem solving (Magosa and Shokane, 2018). This study therefore explored indigenous knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria a major country with Africa. The key research questions were (i) what are the challenges of social work education in Nigeria? (ii) How can indigenous and Western knowledge be harmonized in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria?

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 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 its participants (Crossman, 2020; Kalof et al., 2008). According to Crossman (2020), the purpose of qualitative sampling is to explain, describe and interpret a phenomenon among a subset of the population. A

Phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to give a voice and make sense of what participants said based on their lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The approach was exploratory and allowed participants to tell their stories. The interviewers remained neutral during this process whilst facilitating the telling of a rich, detailed and reflective account of participants' experiences and perspectives. As researchers, we acknowledged our own worldview, with its cultural, political, and emotional, perspectives which could become subjectively intertwined with the study. In order to address this we, as researchers, made our preconceptions visible and challenged each other to minimize the way in which we impacted upon data collection and interpretation.

The study participants included 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 interviews. The reason for this was to select participants with sufficient experience for the study acknowledging that the strength and usefulness of qualitative research is not in number but 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. Length of time on the course was considered important to be able to reflect on the teaching and practice opportunities provided on the course. 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 and Babbie, 2008). Practitioners were

eligible to participate in the study if their job description identified their posts as core social work and were graduates of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Purposive sampling technique was also used to select four social work educators from the University of Nigeria Nsukka that had spent at least three years teaching social work courses and had undergone a postgraduate programme in social work from the University of Nigeria Nsukka.

Data collection

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data. While sharing their experience on indigenous knowledge and social work education in Nigeria, we used probes to explore the place of indigenous knowledge and Western pedagogy in the social work curriculum. We also probed on challenges impeding the development of social work education and practice in Nigeria. Questions such as: “How is the present social work curriculum based on your personal experience effective in projecting indigenous knowledge in social work education in Nigeria? What are the challenges of social work education and practice in Nigeria based on your personal experience? Why should western pedagogy and indigenous knowledge be visible in the curriculum of social work education in Nigeria? Discussion with social work students and educators were 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 the interview was conducted via mobile phone.

Data analysis

The data analysis included reflection on the participant’s experiences and interpretation of indigenous knowledge including the challenges to social work education in Nigeria. These were grounded in the participants’ experiences and views. To begin the process of data analysis, the research assistants recorded the responses using audiotape. Data was then analyzed after

transcribing the interviews into English. The transcribed discussions were then 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, not lost in translation whilst also helping to validate views making the data more reliable (Kalof et al., 2008). After transcription, the researchers compared the contents of the transcripts with the field notes to ensure coherence. Data immersion commenced by repeatedly hearing the audio and reading the transcribed discussion and field notes for familiarization. The data analysis procedure for this study was based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach [IPA] having followed the qualitative analysis procedure of data reduction, data display and conclusion (Marvasti, 2004).

The translated data was open coded and this was begun immediately after the translation of the data to avoid memory loss. The coded data was further checked by other researchers, grouped and categorized. This was done to ensure that codes with similar characteristics were grouped together thematically. Thematic analysis is a method of data analysis that is often used with IPA to clarify thematic clusters and arrive at key themes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Braun and Clark, 2014). We then went further to identify patterns of meaning in the data by the details given by the participants. According to Larkin and Thompson (2012), when patterns are identified, the researcher can draw themes together into some kind of structure. To add greater rigor to our data analysis, the analysis with relevant discussions was handed to two academic peers who were not part of the research team for further examination. Their insights contributed to the final checks on the analysis. These exercises are in line with peer debriefing in qualitative research (Padgett, 2008). Lastly, contextual or special connotations that addressed the research questions were noted and pulled out as illustrative quotes from the thematic cluster to illustrate key issues below.

Ethical approval

All interviews were carried out with voluntary consent of participants and anonymity was assured to all study participants who received a personal information sheet sent through 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

Results

The results are presented by first describing a summary of the demographic features of the participants. Evidence of result is presented in three themes based on the objective of the study.

These three themes were: social work education in Nigeria: a one sided narrative, challenges of social work education in Nigeria, harmonization of Western and indigenous knowledges in social work curricula in Nigeria.

Demographic characteristic of study participants

All the study participants had an academic background in social work. A total of 10 undergraduate students (5 males and 5 males) participated in the study. The ages of undergraduate students ranged from 22 to 27 years. Six of the undergraduate students were in their final year while four were in their penultimate year. A total of four social work practitioner (2 males and 2 females) who were aged between 30 years to 49 years participated in the study. The practitioners were employed as a Children Protection Officer, Youth Care Coordinator, Social welfare officer and Social Development Officer (also known as social workers). Four social work educators (2 males and 2 females) from the department of social work, university of Nigeria participated in the study. The ages of the social work educators ranged from 25 to 42 years and all have spent at least three years teaching social work courses in the department.

Social work education in Nigeria: A one sided narrative

Findings from the study revealed that most (14 out of 18 (78%)) study participants agreed that social work education in Nigeria was based more on Western knowledge than on indigenous knowledges. For these study participants (mainly social work students and practitioners), social work education in Nigeria was a Western product that was imported into Nigeria. They argued that there is currently no social justice between indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge in social work curriculum in the University of Nigeria. Some participants especially social work educators however felt that Western knowledge laid a solid foundation for the development of social work education in Nigeria and therefore should not be completely ignored in the teaching of social work in Nigeria and Africa. Student social workers and social work practitioners however argued that social work education in Nigeria presents a one-sided narrative which promotes Western ideologies at the expense of indigenous knowledge.

A practitioner commented that:

...at the onset of social work education in Nigeria, we shouldn't have embraced everything in Western social work education to the detriment of our indigenous knowledges. We should have improved, propagated and not have abandoned our own local knowledge.
(Social work practitioner)

Most practitioners recounted their ordeals of trying to resolve ethical dilemma in their practice areas in compliance with organizational principles that often projected Western ideologies and intervention strategies:

“the clients we work with are Nigerians but the intervention strategies and education we received during training as social workers are Western based...you have to respect cultural values of the clients that you are working with...this is problematic”.

A social work practitioner decried the one-sided narrative that Western knowledge had on social work education in Nigeria. This participant explained that:

I am particularly delighted to share my view on this topic because all through my undergraduate and postgraduate days as a social work student in the University of Nigeria, I have been bombarded from every angle with Western method of social work practice... all the theories we use here are Western based and the examples in classroom are more on social work from UK and USA. **[Social work practitioner]**

The experience of propagating Western theories and knowledge in social work education according to many social work practitioners and student social workers suggest that social work education in Nigeria is made in the West and not in Nigeria. A study participant who expressed his annoyance said: “this had left me wondering if nothing good can actually be said about Nigeria or African indigenous knowledge and cultural practice in social work education”. This view was however countered when a social work educator narrated that social work education in Nigeria teaches student social workers to be aware of their culture, other cultures and the implication of cultural diversities, ideologies and knowledges beyond the shores of Africa “Without such awareness, students might graduate with certificates; but lack the basic requisite skills and broad-based knowledge required to practice in both Global North and Global South”.

Indigenous knowledges were seen by all participants as vital for culturally competent practice. A student social worker emphatically said...every student social worker should be made to be aware of the diverse cultural practices, values and perspectives within his or her environment and that of other cultures within the Nigeria Nation”. In affirmation, views from practitioners and educators revealed that knowledge sharing on different indigenous practices would help students to think creatively about the challenges within and foster solutions that reflect indigenous values.

All other social work students and two of the social work educators upheld the need to promote, “made in Nigeria” teaching and practical examples to help students appreciate indigenous knowledge”. It was obvious from the discussions that majority of the study participants affirmed that the process of social work education in Nigeria is like a finished product imported from the Western world.

Most of what we are taught in the classroom reflects the culture, problems and beliefs of the Western world. Our indigenous knowledge is often ignored in the classroom teaching... even examples are given to us based on Western cases studies...we should come up with our own local contents in the teaching and practice of social work (**Social work student**).

In contrast some study participants, particularly social work educators however did not believe that social work education was a finished product from the Western world. Whilst one educator felt that this was the case, three social work educators believed that indigenous knowledges through evidence informed research is crucial to the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria. The need for research was constantly brought to the fore as the vehicle through which knowledge of local practice can be studied and disseminated. Social work educators affirmed that Western knowledge cannot be entirely jettisoned in the teaching and practice of social work in Nigeria.

We are today living in a global community and so we need knowledge from the Global North just as they will also need indigenous knowledge to understand our own aspect of social work education. The research you are undertaking now is to share knowledge...we should do more on our indigenous knowledge to make it more public...much is not known about our indigenous knowledge for now (**Social work educator**)

Challenges of social work education in Nigeria

Findings from the study revealed that social work practitioners admitted that some aspect of indigenous knowledge is incorporated into the teaching of social work in Nigeria, but this is often ignored in practice. Most practitioners argued that social work educators seem to favour Western knowledge in the teaching of social work because that aspect of knowledge is readily available in books and other on-line materials. In defense to this assertion, a social work educator said: “We are training these students to be professional social workers in the future and so we must do everything possible to let them know that the world is now a global village...we cannot throw away Western knowledge”. To understand how indigenous knowledge is incorporated in the field of practice, a practitioner explained:

Yes, my training in social work took cognizance of indigenous knowledge... just few of them...can't remember now...I am a practicing social worker but I don't respect this indigenous knowledge in my practice with my client...because we embrace Western knowledge due to the background of the organization I am working with...there are Western materials for you to read and find your way around safe practice... **(Social work practitioner)**

This practitioner who was infuriated with the level of social work education in Nigeria, continued by saying:

...where is the material on our indigenous knowledge...no textbooks, no conference, no workshops and no training opportunities within the country to share knowledge about what we do in our different fields of practice in our organization. There is so much training for me outside Nigeria...I use what I know on Western knowledge to practice as a social worker here in Nigeria **(Social work practitioner)**.

Some practitioners believed that social workers in various practice agencies in Nigeria were struggling to balance indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge, many felt they were exposed so much Western knowledge in their course that they knew little about our their own local knowledge. “That is why we sometimes don’t even know what to do or the techniques to apply. We know too much from the Western culture but cannot apply everything given our local realities”. In clarifying this, a social work practitioner explained thus:

We know too much about Western ideology and too little about our indigenous knowledge and we are in constant struggle with these two knowledges and how to fit them in perfectly during intervention...we end up using Western knowledge which is everywhere for us...you see it online, in books and training programmes which is sometime free for download **(Social work practitioner)**

Views from student social workers revealed that indigenous knowledges are sidelined in academic curriculum because the foundation of social work education in the Nigeria was an imported Western idea that sought to provide answers to our increasing social problems.

...”yes social work was created with Western culture and ideologies without consideration of indigenous knowledge...well we have learnt some knowledge on ethnicity and cultural diversity but we don’t know what those diversity are and how to manage them... so we need more research to talk more about our cultural knowledge **(Social work student)**.

A social work practitioner was emphatic when he said: “I read something from a book that revealed that social work curriculum presently in-use in teaching student social workers both at the graduate and undergraduate level in Nigeria places less emphasize on our cultural practices” He went further to explain that:

...all our cultural practices may not be good or perfect but I must tell you that so many of them are very good and need to be discovered and made more visible in social work curriculum. Much to be blamed is the less attention given to research on indigenous knowledge which has continued to subordinate indigenous knowledge (**social work practitioner**).

Findings from the study reveal that student social workers held on to the view that some practices are peculiar to some indigenous groups in Nigeria and thus need to be studied to assess whether to promote, abolish or enhance their practice. For example, a social work student explained that indigenous knowledges concerning the practice of female genital mutilation, child marriage, harmful rites of passage, and widowhood practices should be fully explored in the curriculum of social work practice to seek ways to abolish such practice through engagement with relevant stakeholders. According to a student: “there are problems unique to the Nigeria society that are not found abroad...problems like the practice of Osu-caste system, communal land conflict, ethnic intolerance, child witchcraft accusation”. This student went ahead to explain that:

...these practices need to be studied further and appropriate indigenous theories developed for effective intervention... most of the Western theories and intervention strategies might not be effective if applied in such cases. Although, Western knowledge and theories has helped in tackling problems such as: terrorism, public health challenges, human right violations...some challenges requires the development of local theories that will be helpful in tackling our problem (**Social work student**).

For another social work student: “most of what is contained in the social work curriculum reflects Western knowledge and culture...Well we have courses like ethno cultural relations...the course teaches us so many things...only few ethnic groups are highlighted in the course”. Student social

workers felt that there is need for greater awareness of the various cultural practices and indigenous knowledges of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. This would provide a means by which social workers become more exposed to the cultural diversities of the Nigerian people and thus develop strategies that will address the age long challenge of peaceful co-existence. For yet 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 indigenous knowledge...we don't even have text books written by Nigeria authors...only a few local text books in social work and they are not even exhaustive like Western textbooks. The Western knowledge is more evident in our curriculum... **(Social work student)**

Other practitioners decried situations where indigenous knowledge about the African cultural practice is written by foreign authors. One of the practitioners' referred to this as the case of "an outsider sharing my personal evidence". Such a position could also be viewed as a re-colonization of Nigerian cultural experiences.

Harmonization of Western and indigenous knowledge

All participants for this study criticized the present social work curriculum. However, they were of the view that Western and indigenous knowledges needed to be harmonized in the social work curriculum in Nigeria to provide the best training for social work students and practitioners. Practitioners were of the view that there was a need to identify similarities, differences and connections between indigenous and Western knowledge thereby establishing a way they can be blended into the curriculum. A practitioner said:

Western ideologies will not be completely deleted from our curriculum, but it will be better if indigenous knowledge is advanced too...Does the white man use our knowledge in Nigeria to solve their problem? The answer is no. We must understand our cultural practices, diversities and challenges...Learning from our indigenous knowledge system can help us solve our own problem rather than depend on others for support every time (**Social work practitioner**)

A social work educator explained that the social work curriculum in Nigeria prepare students to meet and address the needs of the individual and society at large: “this notion should be a meeting point for both indigenous and Western knowledge...both are important in social work education and practice.”

Discussion

Findings from the present study revealed the urgent need for a review of the social work curriculum to integrate indigenous knowledges into the social work education programme at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. A curriculum review offers the opportunity to infuse local contents that will address social problems taking cognizance of various ethnic and cultural diversities within the Nigeria society. Onlau and Okoye (2021) in a recent study highlighted the need for a review of the social work curriculum at the University of Nigeria Nsukka as findings revealed challenges in structural deficiencies of local contents in problem solving. In an earlier study, Amadasun (2020a), noted that social work education in Nigeria and Africa needed to co-opt a framework that is conducive to challenging structural deficiencies and dysfunctions. This assertion has been corroborated in other studies in Africa (Canavera et al., 2020; Mabvurira, 2018; Spitzer, 2019; Twikirize and Spitzer, 2019; Ugiagbe 2015).

Reconnecting to a framework that challenges structural deficiencies will provide a platform where African and Western social work community can learn and share knowledge that will strengthen global practice, promote social justice and ensure that unheard voices in the education of social work in the Global South are heard. Such engagement will require the commitment of practitioners, educators and researchers to challenge this imbalance in the social work curriculum and increase the visibility of indigenous knowledges (Amadasun, 2020a; Nnama-Okechukwu and McLaughlin, 2022). Without greater attention being paid to African indigenous knowledges not only does Nigerian social work lose out, but the Western world misses out on the opportunity to learn from Nigerian and African practice. The Western world has already mainstreamed the example of family group conferences which derived from the experience of Maori's in New Zealand (Owens et al. 2021)

More importantly based on findings of this study is that there is need for a decolonization of knowledges to provide an alternative to the Western Eurocentric perspectives on culture, history, and education utilized in Nigeria. Decolonization will help put social work education in Nigeria on the path of developing home grown theories and models in the teaching and practice of social work. Such inclusion will advance Afro-centric frameworks, theories and philosophies in social work education in Nigeria while also recognizing the benefits of certain Western practice-based approaches. This infusion will help to rebalance the curriculum of social work whilst seeking ways of mutual co-existence and potential new synergies. The indigenization discourse of social work education in Nigeria and other parts of Africa has sought to promote African philosophies in social work education (Canavera et al, 2020; Onokerhoraye, 2011; Spitzer and Twikirize 2019; Ross, 2010; Ugiagbe, 2015)

It was evident from research findings that indigenous and Western knowledge need to be harmonized. This can be done through a combined academic process whereby practitioners, students and social work educators can work collaboratively to review the challenges facing social work education and identify a new curriculum to address these in Nigeria. This harmonization would position social work education in Nigeria on the path of avoiding the danger of a single story (Nnama-Okechukwu and McLaughlin, 2022). Social justice for social work education in Nigeria starts from decolonization and promotion of indigenous knowledges as equal to 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 teaching methodology according to respondents will promote the integration of African framework and theories into social work education in Africa and hence promote a paradigm shift from Western pedagogy to a more inclusive African pedagogy.

Implications for social work

This study attempts to strengthen the social work educational sector in Nigeria by exploring the experiences of social work practitioners, social work students and educators in Nigeria as a way of understanding what needs to change. The study's findings revealed that social work education in Nigeria was largely dominated by Western knowledge, theories and beliefs. This consequently resulted in a one-sided narrative where Western ideologies are advanced and indigenous knowledge was sidelined. This non-inclusive teaching and learning methodology has been argued to be a continuing colonization process where knowledge from Europe is imported and planted in the African academy. Overall, exploring the place of indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge in the teaching and practice of social work education brought to the fore the need for

evidence informed research in social work education in Nigeria and other countries in Africa. This has the potential to promote a sustainable educational path for social work education and practice in Nigeria thus promoting the SDGs agenda of “leave no one behind”

Study Limitations

Findings from this study represent the views of social work educators, practitioners and student social workers from one University in one Nigerian state. To be able to generalize these findings a much larger scale project would have had to be undertaken involving multiple participants from a greater number of states across Nigeria. However, the findings from the study resonated with other African research studies and suggest a critical for a review of the social work curriculum and greater professionalization of social work education in Nigeria.

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