

# Exploring Language as an Impediment to or a Resource for the Indigenisation of Social Work Education

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## ABSTRACT

The enduring dominant influences from Western countries have long been felt in the different spheres of political ideologies, education, and financial, technological and intellectual discourses, particularly in Africa. In spite of wide-ranging inequalities, the end of the colonial era has seen a remarkable progress of Third World academic and scientific systems and a significant degree of independence and objectivity. The aim of this article is to analyse language as an impediment to or a resource for, and the dynamics of educational processes towards, the indigenisation of social work education. The authors reviewed and analysed literature as research design. The study adopted the Afrocentricity theory, as it seeks to recreate a historiography that represents and recognises South African cultural influences on human evolution and development. In this article, literature was used to explore the ways in which people use cultural knowledge to inform social work education. The review particularly focuses on language as an impediment to or a resource for the indigenisation of social work education and the dynamics of educational processes. The literature review clarifies that, by virtue of their mainly Eurocentric training, social work educators seldom consider indigenous knowledge of Black South Africans over and above Western-oriented world views, and have neglected the significance of Black South African indigenous knowledge insofar as initiatives towards practice interventions are concerned. Future research should focus on how university policies, material development and dissemination of information can be harmonised to encompass indigenous languages in social work education and training.

**Keywords:** language; indigenous knowledge; educational processes; social work education



Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development  
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SWPR>  
Volume 30 | Number 1 | 2018 | #2973 | 20 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2415-5829/2973>  
ISSN 2415-5829 (Online) | ISSN 0520-0097 (Print)  
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## Introduction and Background

The challenge inherent in current social work practice in Africa is that its origin and development are skewed towards the West, its emergence in Africa is contextualised in the philosophy and principles rooted in social Darwinism, capitalism and selfishness, all of which are un-African (Mabvurira 2016). Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014) argue that the situation was worsened by the United Nations, which forced colonial bureaucrats to initiate social work education and practice into African colonies. Thus, notwithstanding ethical skirmishes between traditional African cultures, beliefs and values, colonial practices and thinking still permeate social work institutions (Gray, Coates, and Yellow Bird 2008). According to Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014), it was owing to these foreign influences that social workers in Africa completely disregarded traditional cultures and support systems based on collective values. Therefore, colonial practices and ideas are still prevalent in social work education and practice in the South African higher education sector.

Abu-Saad (2008) contends that one of the enduring conflicts of African people in opposing oppression is the capacity to apply the ultimate right to represent themselves. Previously, Rains, Archibald and Deyhle (2000) and Smith (1999) also averred that indigenous African people want to express their world views with their own narratives and words, rather than to be articulated of or about. Moreton-Robinson (2004, 75) argues that “indigenous peoples were traditionally relegated to the category of objects that were known, and seldom if ever appeared in academic discourses as subjects who were knowers, or producers of knowledge”. It can, therefore, be deduced that social work curricula in all South African universities have the remnants of colonial thinking regarding appropriateness and relevance to teaching and learning, research agenda, and community engagement. Similarly, this view is confirmed by the report of the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013), which postulates that in spite of progress made, there remain colonial and apartheid injustices in education too.

Atal (1981) and Yunong and Xiong (2008) argue that a system such as colonialism was used by Western countries to aid in securing power and to spread their world views. Alfred (2004, 89) defines colonialism as “a fundamental denial of our freedom to be indigenous in a meaningful way”. To that end, Bulhan (2015) asserts that colonialism deserted persisting legacies, including political and economic, as well as social, scholarly and social inheritances that keep European domination alive. Bulhan further argues that a critical legacy of colonialism which is not adequately scrutinised is the way previously colonised peoples attain knowledge, comprehend their history and the world, and define themselves. Mignolo (2000) and Quijano (2000) made valuable contributions towards the analysis of colonised ways of knowing, behaving and being. Their analysis points out that Eurocentric epistemology, ontology and ideology originate from sustaining and authenticating European monopoly of power, hegemonic knowledge, distorted truth, and deformed being of the colonised. Therefore, Third World countries were bounded by political, economic and academic colonialism; hence, both political decolonisation

and indigenisation of sciences (including social sciences) are vital and essential in the achievement of autonomy (Yunong and Xiong 2008).

Habashi (2005) points out that, conventionally, during the enlightenment and colonisation periods, indigenous scholars had to disregard indigenous knowledge and adopt colonial discourse in their teaching, learning and research. Creary (2012) contends that decolonisation must be understood as a struggle to realise African humanity on its own terms, which is fundamentally realisable in the realm of intellectual practice. Similarly, Smith and Jeppesen (2017, 8) explained that “By decolonisation, I mean the abolition of all prejudice, of any superiority complex in the minds of the coloniser, and also of any inferiority complex in the mind of the colonised”. Therefore, the decolonisation of social work education in Africa will challenge both the dominant contemporary methods of knowing and will reinforce indigenous identity and discourse.

So to deal with the legacy of colonialism, it is essential to also decolonise the intellectual landscape of the country in question, and eventually, to decolonise the mind of the formerly colonised (Oelofsen 2015). Habashi (2005, 771) further recognises that “indigenous discourse resists alien paradigms and uses a native method of knowing. The foundation of decolonising research is the empowerment of subordinate narratives that challenge Western ways of meaning/understanding as well as the views of non-Eurocentric studies”. This has long been expressed by Marchant (2009, 3), who averred that indigenous people ponder, reflect and construe the world and its realities in varied ways from non-indigenous people because of their experiences, histories, spirituality, culture and values. Therefore, the decolonisation of social work education embraces indigenous knowledge discourse by promoting the use of native or local method of knowing rather than solely foreign paradigms. These foreign paradigms sustain the colonisation of values which Bulhan regards as a form of metacolonialism<sup>1</sup>. He asserts that metacolonialism upholds that Europeans and their descendants are superior to all other human beings in intelligence, power, beauty and wealth. To this end, the decolonisation of education is based on the notion of challenging colonial methods of interpretation, understanding and meanings (Bulhan 2015). This means therefore that decolonisation embraces culturally relevant education, and thus Ladson-Billings (1995), in corroboration with this view, states that culturally relevant education should create an environment for students to preserve their cultural integrity while succeeding educationally. Similarly, Habashi (2005, 774) asserts that “decolonisation implies that scholars from formerly colonised nations are now free from oppressive conditions and have the academic freedom to produce, implement, or reconstruct cultural discourses”. This is a plea for constructive and goal-directed cultural discourse by both social work educators and practitioners who have been deprived of their fundamental cultural

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1 Metacolonialism is a socio-political, economic, cultural, and psychological system that comes after, along with, or among the earlier stages of colonialism.

integrity and recognition. This will be the right step towards the decolonisation of social work education in South Africa.

Similarly, an earlier observation by Raina (1999) pointed out that the preponderance of colonial philosophies, practices and styles has frequently been established to be impracticable in developing countries. This has resulted in serious considerations and efforts being made towards the development of theories, philosophies, models and methodologies appropriate for these countries, hence the task of decolonising social work education. In support of this, a decade and half ago, Goulet (2001) observed that it is also important for educators to associate and learn from families and communities. This will enable educators to ascertain, affirm and value cultural practices, language and knowledge of all people in the classroom to deal with unsuitable and irrelevant teaching practices of the colonial and apartheid era.

The aim of this paper is to embed social indigenous knowledge in social work education that will also affect social work practice and service users in a South African context. This involves, for example, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge philosophies and practices (*ubuntu*, mutual coexistence, symbiotic relationships, *letsema* – [indigenous mutual groups], sharing and togetherness) in the social work education curriculum.

## Problem Formulation

The call for decolonising education generally, and in particular social work education, has been made in view of the current socio-economic dynamics. Regrettably, the prevailing South African conditions, particularly in social work education, are that the language of education remains powerfully influenced by the colonial past. Thus, calls for the decolonisation of social work education in South Africa seem to be a symptom of an increasing awareness (Drower 2002; Gray, Kreitzer, and Mupedziswa 2014). Through this act of intellectual self-determination, indigenous academics are developing new analyses and methodologies of decolonising themselves, their communities and their institutions (Cajete 2000; Kawagley, Norris-Tull, and Norris-Tull 1995). Impassioned pleas have been made from various quarters of the developing world to reorient educational foci on the socio-cultural realities of individual countries (Raina 1999). Socio-economic and educational systems are influenced by colonial powers, especially in parts of what is still called the Third World. This view was echoed some time ago by Blaut (1993), who stated that the Eurocentric idea attests that no one but Europeans can advance, and that indigenous people are solidified in time, guided by learning frameworks that strengthen the past and that do not look towards what is to come.

According to Raina (1999, 7), a good number of sources have documented “the linkages that exist within education systems between the colonial masters of the past and the Third World countries of the present”. Colonialists’ socio-economic and educational structures have infiltrated and colonised African indigenous cultures, languages, values,

practices, beliefs and customs. Raina (1999, 7) has argued that the “structure of education systems, from kindergarten to research institute, reflects Western models”. In agreement, Prah (2006, 9) states that the “protest against Afrikaans as Language of Instruction (LOI) under Apartheid marked a watershed in the history of Apartheid fascism in South Africa. Indeed, it announced to the wider world the coming and eventual demise of Apartheid”. Therefore, the post-apartheid education system has been slow, awkward as well as sabotaged in accommodating indigenous languages. In schools and universities, administrative and academic structures imitate Western approaches at the expense of indigenous languages. This is further confirmed by Kavanagh (1998), who argued that language and culture are at the core of everything a school does, and their consideration and inclusion in the education and training procedures and processes must be viewed as a prerequisite, not an option. To effect the decolonisation of social work education, it must start with the development of indigenous languages so as to fit within the academic and economic realm.

Regrettably, the colonial education outlook, attitudes, customs, practices and philosophies have created a scholarly dependence on Western intellectual models, paradigms and approaches as they seem to have soaked into the psyche of the colonised (Raina 1999). To this end, social work education and training in South Africa resemble the colonial outlook, attitudes, customs, practices and philosophies of education. As a result, the indigenous designs of social work education and training remain undeveloped in South Africa.

## Literature Review

Almost five decades ago, Rao (2013) indicated that the social work profession and social work education have not been free from colonial influence in spite of influences through conferences, workshops and in classrooms. The need for indigenisation exists because of the unsuitability of Western theories as they do not mould the history and culture of indigenous people (Nimmagadda and Balgopal 2000; Nimmagadda and Chakradhar 2006; Wilson and Yellow Bird 2005). The quest for decolonising education has not stopped as strategies to do this are foremost in the minds of many indigenous scholars (Baskin 2011; Wilson and Yellow Bird 2005), who argue not only for the reclaiming of language, culture and land, but also for resistance to ongoing oppression in areas such as educational practice (Iseke-Barnes 2008) and forms of helping (Sinclair 2004). The challenge of decolonising social work must be first dealt with by changes in the implementation of the policy (RSA 2002) in which, given the marginalisation of indigenous languages in the past, the state “must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages” (RSA 1996, Section 6(2)). It has been stated by Battiste and Henderson (2000, 290) that “Survival for Indigenous people is more than a question of physical existence ... it is an issue of protecting, preserving, and enhancing Indigenous world views, knowledge systems, languages

and environments. It is a matter of sustaining spiritual links with ecosystems and communities". Social work in South Africa is offered in the language of colonisers and imperialists at the expense of the majority of the student population. Henderson (2000) alludes to the fact that educators continue to offer lessons to students by inevitably imitating Eurocentric modes of thought. Regardless of whether it has been recognised by Eurocentric standards, indigenous knowledge has always existed. The acknowledgement and scholarly enactment of indigenous knowledge today is a demonstration of empowerment by indigenous people. The undertaking for indigenous scholarships has been to affirm and stimulate the all-encompassing world view of indigenous knowledge to uncover the riches and abundance of indigenous languages, perspectives, lessons and experiences, all of which have been deliberately rejected by contemporary academic institutions and Eurocentric knowledge frameworks.

## Understanding Indigenisation and its Juncture with Educational Processes

Agrawal (1995) indicates that the focus on localisation and cultural awareness has gained prominence through credible assertions that expose the lexis of development practitioners and philosophers. According to Dei (1993), cultural understanding is the collective appreciation and thoughts of traditional people about the truths of daily living. In elaboration, Dei (1993, 105) states that:

It [indigenous knowledge] includes the cultural traditions, values, beliefs and world views of local people as distinguished from western scientific knowledge. Such local knowledge is the product of indigenous people's direct experiences of the working of nature and its relationship with the social world. It is also a holistic and inclusive form of knowledge.

The question of the indigenisation, contextualisation or Africanisation of education was, and still is, a paramount question in the social, educational and behavioural sciences. Debates about the significance of Africanisation, Afrocentric identity, cultural relevance and the indigenisation of social work practice represent some of the key issues. An analysis of some of these important issues relate to the improvement of the social well-being of people and to attending to health and social pathologies (Drower 2002). This suggests that there is a fundamental need to redefine and understand the current issues affecting human beings, which will assist in the indigenisation of social work education and practice. This therefore means that the indigenisation of social work practice and education must be grounded in values, norms, traditions and customs of people in a particular cultural environment (Osei-Hwedie 1996).

Yang (2005) argues that indigenisation is about incorporating one's considerations of the indigenous philosophy and past of a particular culture into one's methods in practice. This means that localisation is a process of introspection with regard to cultural values, norms and practices in dealing with Western cultural domination. It is

through indigenisation that cultural sensitivity to concepts, topics and methods can be highlighted and strengthened (Adair and Díaz-Loving 1999). Yacat (2005, 22) avers that the meaning of indigenisation is contested, and proffers the description by Sinha (1997), who recognises four “threads” that “knowledge should: (a) arise from within the culture, (b) reflect local behaviours, (c) be interpreted within a local frame of reference and (d) yield results that are locally relevant”. The above-mentioned aspects are the levels of indigenisation and would be useful when contemplating indigenisation.

In consolidating the above views, the meaning of indigenisation can be viewed as twofold: firstly, as resisting Western domination, and secondly, as striving for linguo-cultural independence which has epistemological significance. This implies that the domination of western ethos and values at the expense of African ethos should be limited, and that the provision of social work education and practice should be conveyed using local languages and recognising local cultural values, customs and practices, among others. Furthermore, with regard to epistemological significance, social work education and practice have theoretical frameworks and knowledge bases which have to be adopted and applied in local contexts to ensure relevance. Consequently, Briggs (2005, 102) contends that “western knowledge systems are part of the whole notion of modernity, indigenous knowledge is part of a residual, traditional and backward way of life, a view that may be reinforced by the concentration of work on indigenous knowledge on people in low- and middle-income countries”. Such international and Western awareness is universal rather than peripheral. Some of the serious problems in other societies or cultures stem from inappropriate application of Western social science theories as indigenisation stresses local relevance. Yang (2005, 70) postulates that “instead of building up a system that is thoroughly different from the existing western social sciences, indigenisation problematises the universal application of knowledge, and supports integration of local experience and knowledge by means of exposing and reflecting on the past and neglected indigenous knowledge”. It could be deduced that one’s own current experience is supplemented by the already existing experiences or information grounded in the person’s socio-cultural knowledge background. Therefore, Raina (1999) argues that paradoxically, the colonised education system, even after independence, has been prolonged despite its ramifications and dominance in educational policy.

## The Afrocentric Theory towards the Indigenisation of Social Work Education

As a philosophical and theoretical perspective, the Afrocentric theory provides lenses through which the indigenisation of social work education and practice can be realised. The Afrocentric theory helps in demystifying the universality of knowledge as that negates socio-cultural and political dynamics of people in their locality. Social workers have an ethical and moral obligation to render services in a fair and just manner by

considering and perceiving African and local issues or problems with local eyes and minds. Asante (1987, 6) delineates Afrocentricity as "... literally placing African culture at the centre of any analysis that involves studying African people". Likewise, Thabede (2008, 233) contends that "Afrocentricity is a perspective that allows Africans to be subjects of historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe". Similarly, Asante (1988, 6) argues that "Afrocentricity is the belief in the centrality of Africans in the post-modern era: It is our history, our mythology, our creative motif, and our ethos exemplifying our collective will". Furthermore, Adeleke (1998, 508) concludes that "Afrocentricity developed as a response to the intellectual challenges and perceived threat of a mainstream historiography that was deemed Eurocentric". Over the years Africans have been subjects of research and analysis by people who know and understand little about their socio-cultural and political situations. Any research study should be conceptualised from African world views in order to move in the same pace with the people being researched. The Afrocentric theory puts African cultures, values, mores and practices at the centre of analysis, and these are carried from one generation to the next through the medium of language. As a result, in order to realise the decolonisation of social work, African languages should be embraced.

Similarly, Gray (2001) and Thabede (2008) allude to the Afrocentric theory as a philosophy and a viewpoint which holds that African people can and should see, study and decode realities of life from the vantage point of African individuals, and not from the point of view of European, Asian, African or other non-African individuals who are a distance away from African realities in terms of cultures, values and practices. Social work educators, researchers and practitioners should avoid using Western languages to understand African realities, equate Western cultures and practices with African realities, or make conclusive statements based on Western knowledge while making inferences about African people.

Daniels (2001) explains that the central purpose of Afrocentricity as an academic and scholarly pursuit is to elucidate ancient canards about African people and their traditional philosophies, and to rebuild a historiography that accurately symbolises and concedes African cultural influences on human evolution. In this case, social work educators, researchers and practitioners should immerse themselves in the quest for African knowledge held by indigenous knowledge holders with specific reference to how Africans dealt with particular social issues such as domestic violence, children in the streets, rape, and child-headed households. Critically, a focus should be dedicated to how the philosophy of *ubuntu*, symbiotic relationship, sharing and togetherness contributed to how African realities were dealt with. To this end, the Afrocentric theory can assist in the indigenisation of social work education.



## Language as an Impediment to or a Resource for Indigenisation

According to Heugh (2008), in 1953 UNESCO released a report on “The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education”. Makhubele and Qalinge (2009, 203) state that the report indicates that African nations have been attempting to locate a compelling methodology that would enable them to advance from an education and training framework acquired from the colonial period to a more transformative, inclusive and socio-cultural germane education system. This approach should recognise what Makhubele and Qalinge (2009) referred to as African socio-cultural values, practices, linguistic backgrounds and educational needs of the students. Such a pertinent and effective education approach should be characterised by the use of a more suitable local language, appropriate teaching methods, socially satisfactory educational module contents, and adequate monetary and material assets allocated for the realisation of these aspirations (ADEA 2005). The authors feel strongly that the indigenisation of social work education and practice should be viewed along the same lines as indicated in the report by the ADEA (2005).

Both Marchant (2009) and the ADEA (2005) have encouraged African countries to strive for the relevance of education by adjusting the curricula, and by using African languages in teaching and training. The issue of own language was also espoused by UNESCO’s Education for All in the use of mother tongue education. As a result of Africa’s past colonial history and contemporary neo-colonial relationship, language has predominantly become a sensitive issue. The former colonial powers like Britain, France and Portugal, and multi-dimensional organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund still promote the merging and utilisation of colonial languages in Africa. As a result, they pay scant attention to the necessity of indigenisation of the whole system of education through languages (ADEA 2005). This is facilitated by the fact that most African countries relied on previous colonial influences and multi-dimensional agencies to fund developmental programmes. This situation creates challenges for African countries to utilise their indigenous languages for education in fear of jeopardising their funding.

Vilela (2002) states that in countries controlled by colonial powers, language policies were more supportive for the development and growth of foreign colonial knowledge systems, whether they were in English, French, Portuguese or Spanish. After independence of the colonised countries, these languages were preserved and sustained as official languages. It was believed that these languages would allow these independent countries wider accessibility to the world without the hindrance of language in communication. As a result of this, the “official languages” of the colonisers always occurred adjacent to indigenous languages, which remained unvalued by the colonisers, English being a case in point in South Africa.

The English language remains vital as the key mechanism of scientific, academic and intellectual communication globally. It is no surprise that it is regarded as an official

language globally because of the extent of cultural imperialism. Melitz (2015, 5) therefore asserts that generally, “English tends to be at least one of the official languages of international political organisations”. When one analyses scholarly work, whether in terms of the books translated into Third World languages from Western languages, or in terms of the movement of international students across borders, it is clear that Western languages outweigh local languages (Altbach 1987). Furthermore, Western governments, publishing houses and other parties with vested interests in scholarly work favour the preserve of the existing state of affairs. According to Andrews and Okpanachi (2012, 91), “widely spoken indigenous languages in Africa need to be considered for scholarly communication by African scholars”. This highlights the authors’ argument against the teaching of social work education in a foreign language to the majority of students. A counter argument is, if social work education prepares and forms the foundation for the prevention, protection and promotion of services for the well-being of people in their social, mental and health spheres, it goes without saying that values and philosophies of *ubuntu*, mutual coexistence (symbiotic relationship), sharing and togetherness may take priority. The expression and execution of these values and philosophies may be easily done in local languages than in foreign languages. The provision of education in local languages and the use of these languages by students facilitate active participation and further influence the way people feel about themselves and others.

Thaman (2003, 11) argues that “institutions of high education must recognise ownership and control of indigenous knowledge by indigenous peoples rather than by the academy”. The author further points out that the decolonisation of higher education encompasses the affirmation of indigenous and alternative ways of perceiving the world. For social work academics, it means embracing and affirming African perspectives, ways of knowing and wisdom, and motivating lecturers and students alike to salvage indigenous knowledge and philosophies of teaching and learning that incorporate various experiences of African people. Scholars such as Myrdal (1953), Alatas (1993) and Coates (2013) have pointed out that social work has been taught and practised using Western theories, pedagogies and practice methods, and cautioned intellectuals against the credulous alteration of Western theories and practices. Ladson-Billings (1995) claims that teachers who have used language interaction patterns that approximated the students’ home cultural patterns, were more successful in improving student academic performance.

Pewewardy (2002) suggests that educators who embrace indigenous knowledge systems must be reflective practitioners who possess the observational, empirical, and analytical skills necessary to monitor, evaluate and revise their teaching and learning techniques and methods based on the learning styles of the students that they teach. Pewewardy further alludes to the fact that educators need to comprehend and respect the students’ cultural knowledge bases. This comprises studying the history and culture of indigenous students that incorporate their values, stories, music and myths. Similarly, the provision of social work education through a familiar language does not only help the cognitive

development of students, it is also a positive way of decolonising education. Local language use contributes to students' increasing awareness that they would not have necessarily acquired through the use of a foreign language.

## Educational Dependence on Western Intellectual Models, Paradigms and Approaches

According to Altbach (1989), countries which suffered colonialism experienced an unexpected reality in comparison with countries which could utilise free judgement in the adoption of colonial systems. This also applied to educational systems. Andrews and Okpanachi (2012) further pointed out that Western scholars enforce theories, methods and research practices without taking into consideration cultural diversity and realities of non-European people. In essence, they perpetuate Eurocentrism. It is thus that Njoku (2015) argues that the impact of Western academic models and institutions has been significant from the beginning, and remains important even in the contemporary period. The aforementioned also applies to South Africa.

According to Nabudere (1997), Western philosophers have been inclined to disregard the distinctiveness of diverse cultures and beliefs, pursuing coexistence within the international capitalist system. Therefore, Alatas (2006) and Ferguson (2005) argued that the dearth of home-grown or indigenous theories, concepts and methods in the social sciences mirrors the true conditions of knowledge production in developing countries. These scholars further contend that the social work profession encompasses a wide-ranging fusion of theories, values and practices inclined to the ideological, cultural and political milieus of a particular country. Therefore, the decolonisation of social work education and practice should be obligatory if South African higher education institutions are to rectify the lack of home-grown or indigenous theories, concepts and methods. Social work academics who are Afrocentric in approach should resolve this deficiency by not retelling and imitating Western models, approaches and paradigms, and by avoiding giving Western theories more recognition and power, especially in the scholarship of writing. Social work education in Africa relies heavily on literature penned in the West. This implies that what is written for Western students should be palatable to African students. Most social work textbooks have Western examples and illustrations which may not be suitable in the African context.

## The Indigenisation of Social Work Education

In the United States social work is largely a product of the same industrial revolution that created the welfare state and industrial society (McNutt 2008). Western social work has been heavily influenced by the psychodynamic perspective whose arguments may contradict African beliefs. Dream interpretation, hypnosis and free association are not in tandem with techniques used in traditional African settings. Walton and Abo El Nasr

(1988) pointed out that for the first time in 1971, scholarly writings on social work indigenisation appeared and were recorded. In the early 1970s, the indigenisation movement in the social sciences started to gain momentum (Yunong and Xiong 2008) and reached its prime in the late 1970s (Sun 1995). Yunong and Xiong (2008) accentuated the significance of the socio-economic, political and cultural features of a specific country, and indicated that the indigenisation of social work is a dynamic process from introduction to validation. Therefore, this implies alteration of Western social work scholarly writings to accommodate importing countries' distinctive challenges, preferences, traditional values and practices.

Kaseke (1991, 2001) and Chogugudza (2009) argue that social work in Zimbabwe reflects a wholesale transfer from the British social welfare system. Midgley (as cited in Yunong and Xiong 2008, 619) highlighted that "western social workers exerted a powerful influence over their Third World colleagues and they imposed alien theories and techniques on developing countries, which were unsuited to their cultures and development needs". As argued by Midgley (1981) and Yunong and Xiong (2008), social work indigenisation demands that Western social workers should not enforce Western approaches, paradigms and techniques on developing countries without considering indigenous cultures, values and practices on development issues. The education system in higher education in South Africa was forced to adopt Western scholarship and practice models, firstly, through university policies. In spite of the adoption of bilingual or multilingual stance in the medium of instructions by some, pragmatically, Western languages are used in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Secondly, materials prescribed to students are imported from Western countries at the expense of indigenous knowledge. Thirdly, knowledge production and distribution gatekeeping are still in the hands of dependants of colonisers, who determine what and what not to publish, regardless of the significance of the point or issue in question. In support of this view, Osei-Hwedie (1993) exposes the dearth of scholarly writings by locals that has created a dependence on Western philosophies.

Social work scholars have focused their attention on the indigenisation of social work education (Yunong and Xiong 2008). Mwansa (2011) advances the view that since Africa is entering a new phase of knowledge period, it is anticipated that social work will fuse with African indigenous and Western knowledge. Some social work studies focus on indigenous people. In particular, social work in the Australian context focuses strongly on working with aboriginal tribes (Briskman 2008).

According to Munford and Sanders (2011), transformed practices have emphasised the significance of real indigenous stories and knowledge appropriate to develop people over time that discover their assets in using their individual dynamism, capital and aptitude (developing agency). Thabede (2005) has argued that social work as a practice-based occupation occurs within a specific social milieu. Its training programmes and practices should, therefore, be well-versed and rooted within a cultural context and indigenous knowledge systems of intended communities, and utilise the philosophies

of people in a particular community. During the start of introducing majority Western ideas into training curricula for social work in the African continent, the kind of social work education that was designed then was inappropriate for solving Third World social problems (Thabede 2005). Cheung and Liu (2004) argue that efforts to accelerate the indigenisation of human service professions such as social work in low-resourced countries are relevant, and are based on the factors listed as follows:

- Social work is a contextual occupation as it takes place within a given cultural milieu.
- Current philosophies of social work have been introduced and mostly reflect Western social work practice, values and culture.
- American urban social welfare service models have been adopted, although developing countries are predominantly rural.
- A discipline such as social work, therefore, cannot be acultural and ahistorical.

The incorporation of local content and experiences into training and service programmes assists with indigenisation efforts, and in return, such efforts contribute immensely towards the cultural competency of professionals such as social workers. Rothman (2008) describes cultural competence as a process that encompasses group differences pertaining to gender, sexuality, religion, age, ability, language, and nationality in a manner that recognises, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. Knowledge about the intricacy of individual and social character development and in addition the intersectionality of numerous symbols of oppression that underscore social work issues, practices, and intervention prompted the expanding of cultural competence beyond racial and ethnic classes. The processes and procedures to decolonise social work education should first consider the utilisation of indigenous languages because through them cultural values and practices are transmitted. This applies to the reviewing of university policies of teaching and learning as well as research. Secondly, academics should start developing reading materials in indigenous languages and finally, publication houses should create space for manuscripts to be published in indigenous languages for the wider dissemination of information because this is also being done for the Afrikaans-speaking readership – not at their demise and expense.

## Recommendations

- Universities should embrace indigenous languages in teaching and learning and research, in order to rectify the over-reliance on Western languages for academic scholarships.

- Universities should utilise indigenous languages which will benefit the majority of African students as they will be able to participate productively in class discussions, to relate easily to their real-life situations, and to improve their academic performance.
- Funding should be availed to Afrocentric social work scholars to do more research on the interface between professional social work and African indigenous knowledge.
- Universities, research institutes and publishing houses should partner with African scholars to produce literature on indigenous social work intervention methods.
- Social work students should be sensitised to African belief systems, values, customs, norms, mores and practices through their academic courses.
- Certain concepts should be emphasised in local languages during social work teaching. For instance, the conceptualisation of mental illness, marriage, bereavement, kidnapping, and foster children in indigenous contexts are inconsistent with Western descriptions.
- Future research should be conducted on how university policies, material development and dissemination of information can be harmonised to encompass indigenous languages in social work education and training.

## Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge can play a role in social relations within a system of interchange that embraces the collective cultural knowledge that provides power and status. Therefore, indigenous knowledge is a non-economic factor in education and includes characteristics such as attitudes, characters and customs. The consideration of interfacing folklore and social work by embracing indigenous languages should be encouraged and contextualised to the philosophy of *ubuntu*, mutual coexistence (symbiotic relationship), sharing and togetherness. It can be concluded that practitioners in the social welfare sector have abandoned the significance of indigenous knowledge insofar as their interventions are concerned. The colonial experience and language usage are presently not easily undone in Africa. The indigenisation, contextualisation, decolonisation or Africanisation of education, be it social work and social welfare education was, and still is, questionable. However, it can be as easy or as difficult as we want to make it. Ultimately, human needs should be met in the context of the persons concerned by not imposing restrictions on the way social work help is offered.

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