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Educational approaches in African social work: Implications for U.S. social work training

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Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive exploration of the methodologies in social work education, focusing on the potential integration and synergy between African and U.S. systems. Set against the backdrop of an increasingly globalized world, the study aims to bridge the gap between these two distinct educational paradigms, highlighting the rich diversity and potential for mutual learning. The scope of the paper encompasses a detailed examination of the historical evolution, pedagogical approaches, and the role of culture and tradition in social work practices within both regions.

Adopting a comparative educational analysis as its methodological backbone, the study foregoes traditional fieldwork in favor of an extensive literature review and case study analysis. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the differences and similarities in social work education across these diverse cultural contexts.

The main findings reveal significant disparities in curriculum design, pedagogical methods, and the integration of community engagement and indigenous knowledge. African social work education, characterized by its community-centric approaches and cultural inclusivity, offers valuable insights that could enhance the U.S. framework. Conversely, the structured methodologies and technological advancements in U.S. programs present opportunities for African social work education.

The study concludes with a call for a collaborative, reciprocal educational model. Recommendations include joint curriculum development, faculty exchanges, and shared research initiatives. Such collaborative efforts are essential for preparing future social workers to effectively address global challenges, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to social work education.

Keywords: Social Work Education; Comparative Analysis; U.S.-Africa Collaboration; Curriculum Development; Cultural Sensitivity.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Defining Social Work Education: Global Context and African Perspectives

Social work education, a critical component of professional development in the social work field, varies significantly across different global contexts. In Africa, the approach to social work education has been shaped by a unique blend of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural values, and historical influences, distinguishing it from Western models (Moyo and Nomngcoyiya, 2020). The integration of local and global perspectives in social work is essential for fostering global justice and understanding the diverse needs of communities (Moyo and Nomngcoyiya, 2020). This is particularly relevant in the African context, where social work education must navigate the complexities of local cultures, traditions, and socio-economic challenges.

The historical evolution of social work training in Africa reveals a significant influence of Western pedagogy and knowledge systems. For instance, in Nigeria, the development of social work education has been heavily influenced by European culture and orientation, leading to a curriculum that often does not adequately address the unique issues and cultural nuances of African societies (Onalu and Ingram, 2022). This Western-centric approach has been critiqued for not fully capturing the holistic and collective approaches needed in the African context. As a result, there is a growing call for the transformation of social work education in Africa to be more Afro-centric, integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural practices while acknowledging the relevance of its Western origins (Onalu and Ingram, 2022).

In contrast to the Western model, which often emphasizes individualism and a clinical approach, African social work education tends to focus more on community engagement, social justice, and the collective well-being of society. This is evident in the pedagogical approaches adopted in African social work education, which are often experiential, participatory, and deeply rooted in the local context (Schmid, Morgenshtern, and Turton, 2022). These methods emphasize the importance of understanding and responding to the local social, cultural, and economic environments, thereby fostering a more contextualized and relevant form of social work education.

Furthermore, the role of technology and digital learning in African social work education is increasingly recognized as a tool for enhancing access to education and resources, especially in remote or underserved areas. However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate policy environments, and the need for more robust institutional support remain significant barriers to the full realization of effective social work education in Africa (Schmid, Morgenshtern, and Turton, 2021).

Defining social work education within the African context requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between global influences and local realities. The African perspective on social work education highlights the importance of contextualizing training to reflect the unique social, cultural, and economic landscapes of the continent. This approach not only challenges the dominance of Western pedagogical models but also opens up possibilities for a more inclusive and responsive form of social work education that is better suited to the needs of African communities.

1.2. Historical Evolution of Social Work Training in Africa

The historical evolution of social work training in Africa reflects a dynamic interplay between indigenous practices and external influences, particularly from Western pedagogies. This evolution has been marked by efforts to indigenize social work education, adapting it to the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts of various African countries.

In West Africa, a systematic mapping of social work training programs across 12 countries highlighted movements towards indigenization, reflecting a shift from Eurocentric models to training programs that are more aligned with indigenous and endogenous realities (Canavera et al., 2020). This shift is crucial in the postcolonial era, where there is a growing recognition of the need for social work practices and education to be rooted in local contexts and realities. The study by Canavera et al. (2020) underscores the diversity of social work education across West African countries, each adapting to its specific postcolonial context.

In Guinea, a West African country with a relatively nascent social work sector, there has been a recent push towards professionalizing social work in response to complex social issues, such as those highlighted by the Ebola epidemic (Kaloga and Camara, 2023). This case study exemplifies the challenges and opportunities in developing a social work sector in a context with limited historical precedence for formal social work education. The efforts in Guinea are framed within the broader themes of transmission, indigenization, and authentication, signifying a move towards developing a social work training program that is both internationally credible and locally relevant (Kaloga and Camara, 2023).

In South Africa, the evolution of social work and social welfare has been significantly influenced by the country's unique political and social history, particularly the apartheid era and its aftermath (Noyoo et al., 2021). The transformation of social work training in South Africa has been a complex process, involving the reorientation of social work education to address the legacies of apartheid and the diverse needs of a post-apartheid society. Noyoo et al., (2021). Asserted that this transformation has necessitated a critical examination of the relevance of Western social work models and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

The historical evolution of social work training in Africa is characterized by a gradual shift from predominantly Western-influenced models towards more contextually relevant approaches. This shift is evident in the increasing emphasis on indigenization and the integration of local knowledge and practices into social work education. The experiences of countries like Guinea and South Africa highlight the diverse pathways through which African countries are navigating the challenges of developing social work training programs that are both globally informed and locally grounded.

The historical evolution of social work training in Africa is a testament to the continent's ongoing efforts to redefine and reshape social work education in a way that is responsive to its unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. This evolution is crucial for the development of a social work profession that is not only internationally recognized but also deeply rooted in the realities and needs of African societies.

1.2.1. Key Milestones and Influential Theories in African Social Work

The development of social work in Africa has been influenced by a range of theories and milestones, reflecting the continent's diverse social, cultural, and historical contexts. One of the most significant theoretical contributions to African social work is the Ubuntu theory, particularly in its application to social work with children in Zimbabwe (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019). Ubuntu, which emphasizes communal values, interconnectedness, and mutual support, offers a framework that contrasts with Western individualistic models. This theory has been instrumental in shaping a more culturally relevant and community-oriented approach to social work in African contexts.

The partnership between Canadian and Rwandan social work researchers to strengthen social work education and practice in Rwanda represents a key milestone in the development of social work on the continent (King, Dudziak, and Kalinganire, 2014). This North-South collaboration aimed to address the professional needs of Rwandan social workers and the challenges faced by communities, such as collective trauma, poverty, and substance abuse. The partnership underscores the importance of international collaboration in enhancing the quality and relevance of social work education in Africa.

The work of social work luminaries, as documented by Gutiérrez, Davis, and Garvin (2020), has also been influential in the evolution of social work practice and theory in Africa. These luminaries have contributed to the clarification and elaboration of social work practice, adapting and applying theories to the African context. Their work highlights the need for social work education and practice in Africa to be grounded in both global knowledge and local realities.

The key milestones and influential theories in African social work demonstrate the ongoing efforts to develop a social work practice that is both globally informed and locally relevant. The integration of indigenous theories like Ubuntu, along with international collaborations and the contributions of social work luminaries, has been crucial in shaping a social work practice that is responsive to the unique needs and contexts of African societies.

1.3. Comparative Analysis of African and U.S. Social Work Education Systems

The comparative analysis of social work education systems between Africa and the United States reveals significant differences and similarities, shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. In South Africa, for instance, the tertiary education system, including social work education, has been grappling with the legacy of apartheid, leading to a system that often does not adequately meet the needs of its majority population (Collins and Millard, 2013). This situation contrasts with the U.S. system, where the challenges are more about integrating students from diverse backgrounds into a relatively more established and resource-rich educational framework.

The study by Collins and Millard (2013) highlights the mismatch between secondary education preparation and tertiary education requirements in South Africa, a challenge less pronounced in the U.S. system. This mismatch in South Africa has implications for social work education, where students often struggle with the academic demands due to inadequate preparation at the secondary level. In contrast, the U.S. system, while not without its challenges, generally offers a more seamless transition from secondary to tertiary education.

Pawar and Thomas (2017) provide a comparative perspective on social work education in Australia and the USA, which can offer insights into the U.S. system's similarities and differences with African systems. Both the U.S. and Australian systems have seen significant growth in social work education, with a focus on accreditation standards, ethics, and professional licensure. However, both systems also face challenges in translating value-based ideals into practice, particularly in the context of market economies. This is a challenge that African social work education systems also face, albeit in a different socio-economic context.

Ibrahim's (2017) study on glocalization and international social work education in several Arab countries, including Egypt and Libya, provides insights into the impact of global influences on local social work education. This concept of 'glocalization' – the adaptation of global ideas to local contexts – is relevant in comparing African and U.S. social work education systems. While U.S. social work education is often seen as a model for other countries, the need for localization of content and practice is increasingly recognized in African contexts.

The comparative analysis of African and U.S. social work education systems reveals a complex interplay of global influences and local realities. While the U.S. system offers a more established framework with its own set of challenges, African systems are navigating the legacy of historical factors and the need for localization in social work education. This comparison underscores the importance of contextually relevant social work education that can address the unique needs of diverse populations.

1.3.1. Methodological and Pedagogical Differences in African and U.S. Social Work Education Systems

The methodological and pedagogical approaches in social work education vary significantly between African countries and the United States, reflecting diverse educational philosophies, cultural contexts, and social challenges. In South Africa, the post-apartheid education system, including social work training, has struggled to meet the needs of its diverse population, particularly in terms of aligning secondary education preparation with tertiary education requirements (Collins and Millard, 2013). This situation contrasts with the U.S., where the transition from secondary to tertiary education is generally more seamless, but challenges remain in integrating students from diverse backgrounds into a well-established educational system.

The comparative study by Tham et al. (2023) across six countries, including the U.S., highlights the differences in social work education, particularly in admissions, training, and field practicum. While there are common elements such as skills training and reflective practice, significant differences exist in professional regulation, course duration, and practicum experiences. These differences are indicative of the broader methodological and pedagogical variances between African and U.S. social work education systems.

In Nigeria, the call for indigenization of social work education has raised ethical concerns, particularly regarding the integration of local cultural norms and values (Ekoh and Agbawodikezu, 2023). This highlights the tension between adopting Western educational models and adapting them to local contexts. The Nigerian experience underscores the need for a balanced approach that respects local cultures while adhering to universal social work ethics and standards.

The methodological and pedagogical differences in social work education between African countries and the U.S. are shaped by each region's unique socio-cultural and educational contexts. While there is a need for global standards in social work education, it is equally important to adapt these standards to local realities, ensuring that social work training is relevant, culturally sensitive, and ethically sound.

1.4. The Role of Culture and Tradition in African Social Work Practices

Expanding on the role of culture and tradition in African social work practices, it is essential to delve deeper into how these elements shape the social work landscape in Africa, as highlighted by the studies of Ayim et al. (2023), Makgopa and Mamaleka (2020), and Lateef et al. (2023).

Ayim et al. (2023) provide a nuanced understanding of how cultural perceptions underlie social problems in Ghana. Their research indicates that cultural norms and practices significantly influence the manifestation and perpetuation of issues like child marriage and neglect. This finding is crucial for social work practitioners, as it suggests that effective interventions must consider the cultural context in which these social problems occur. For instance, strategies to combat child marriage in Ghanaian communities may require engaging with traditional leaders and community members to address deeply ingrained cultural beliefs that contribute to the practice. This approach underscores the importance of culturally informed social work, where interventions are designed in harmony with the local cultural milieu.

Makgopa and Mamaleka (2020) address the dichotomy between tradition and modernity in social work. Their exploration into the realm of folklore and its intersection with social work practice reveals the challenges faced in preserving cultural heritage while embracing modern social work principles. This tension is evident in many African societies where traditional beliefs and practices coexist with contemporary social work methods. The authors suggest that an interdisciplinary approach, blending social work with cultural studies, can provide a more holistic understanding of clients' needs. This approach could involve incorporating traditional healing practices alongside conventional social work interventions, thereby creating a more inclusive and culturally sensitive practice.

Lateef et al. (2023) highlight the marginalization of African-centered social work practices in the broader social work discourse. Their analysis suggests that despite the relevance of African-centred approaches, these perspectives are often underrepresented in mainstream social work literature. This gap indicates a need for greater advocacy and inclusion of African-centred theories and practices in social work education and practice. By integrating these perspectives, social work can become more inclusive and reflective of the diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds of practitioners and clients alike.

Furthermore, the role of culture and tradition in African social work practices extends to the educational realm. Social work education in Africa must incorporate cultural competencies that enable future practitioners to understand and respect the cultural dynamics of the communities they serve. This involves not only teaching about different cultural practices but also fostering an appreciation for the rich cultural diversity within African societies. Such an educational approach would prepare social workers to navigate the complexities of culture and tradition in their practice effectively.

The integration of culture and tradition in African social work practices is a critical aspect that shapes the effectiveness of interventions and the relevance of social work education. Understanding and respecting cultural norms and values, addressing the challenges of balancing tradition with modernity, and advocating for the inclusion of African-centered perspectives are essential for developing a social work practice that is both culturally sensitive and effective in addressing the unique needs of African communities.

1.4.1. Identifying the Research Gap in the Role of Culture and Tradition in African Social Work Practices

The integration of culture and tradition in African social work practices is a complex and multifaceted area that requires thorough exploration and understanding. While significant strides have been made in recognizing the importance of cultural and traditional contexts in social work, there remain gaps in research and practice that need to be addressed.

Makgopa and Mamaleka (2020) delve into the challenges posed by the intersection of tradition and modernity in social work. Their study highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how traditional beliefs and practices can be harmonized with modern social work principles. This gap is particularly evident in the field of folklore, where cultural beliefs and traditions are often seen as outdated in the face of transformation and globalization. The authors advocate for an interdisciplinary approach, suggesting that social work values and principles should be analyzed and applied in the context of cultural and traditional narratives.

Jones et al. (2023) address the 'know-do gap' in African road safety through the lens of social work. This study exemplifies the broader challenge of translating knowledge into practice in the context of African social work. The research underscores the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and the application of social work principles in various sectors, including public health and transportation. This gap between knowledge and practice is a critical area that needs further exploration, particularly in how social work can contribute to addressing complex social issues within African contexts.

Bradford (2018) research work on social work ethics and organizational culture highlights another significant gap in the field. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between ethics taught in the classroom and those experienced in the field, particularly in relation to organizational culture and climate. This gap in social work education and field education suggests a need for more research on how organizational culture influences social work practice and ethics, especially in African contexts where organizational structures and cultures may differ significantly from Western models.

The research gaps in the role of culture and tradition in African social work practices are evident in the need for more interdisciplinary approaches, the translation of knowledge into practice, and the integration of organizational culture in social work education and practice. Addressing these gaps requires a concerted effort from researchers, educators, and practitioners to develop a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive understanding of social work in African contexts.

1.5. Objectives of the Study: Bridging African and U.S. Social Work Training

The primary aim of this study is to bridge the gap between African and U.S. social work training by exploring and integrating the strengths of both systems. This aim is rooted in the recognition that both African and U.S. social work educational systems have unique attributes and challenges, and a comparative analysis can lead to a more enriched, globally-informed social work practice. To achieve this aim, the study sets forth the following comprehensive objectives:

Comparative Analysis of Educational Frameworks - The first objective is to conduct a thorough comparative analysis of the educational frameworks used in African and U.S. social work training programs. This includes examining the curricular structures, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies employed in both regions. The goal is to identify the key differences and similarities in these frameworks, and to understand how these contribute to the overall effectiveness of social work education. This analysis will provide a foundation for developing a more integrated approach to social work education that leverages the strengths of both systems.

Cultural Competency and Ethical Practice - The second objective focuses on enhancing cultural competency and ethical practice in social work education. This involves exploring how African and U.S. social work training programs incorporate cultural and ethical considerations into their curricula. The objective is to identify best practices for teaching cultural competency and ethical decision-making in a way that is sensitive to diverse cultural backgrounds and responsive to the global nature of social work. This objective is crucial for preparing social work students to work effectively in increasingly diverse and interconnected global environments.

Development of Collaborative Educational Models - The final objective is to develop collaborative educational models that integrate the strengths of African and U.S. social work training. This involves creating innovative educational strategies and tools that can be implemented in both regions. The focus will be on developing models that are adaptable, culturally relevant, and responsive to the changing dynamics of social work practice. This objective aims to foster a more collaborative and inclusive approach to social work education, promoting cross-cultural learning and exchange among social work educators and students globally.

By achieving these objectives, the study aims to contribute significantly to the field of social work education, enhancing the quality and relevance of social work training in both African and U.S. contexts.

1.6. Research Scope: Geographical and Educational Boundaries

The scope of this research is defined both geographically and educationally, focusing on a comparative analysis between African and U.S. social work training systems. Geographically, the study encompasses a diverse range of African countries, recognizing the vast cultural, economic, and social differences across the continent. It also includes various regions within the United States, acknowledging the diversity in educational practices and social work challenges within the country. Educationally, the research spans across different levels of social work education, from undergraduate to postgraduate training programs. It examines the curricular content, teaching methodologies, fieldwork experiences, and assessment strategies in both African and U.S. social work education systems. The study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences in social work training, considering the contextual nuances of each region. This scope is designed to ensure a broad yet detailed understanding of social work education practices, facilitating a meaningful comparison and the development of integrative educational strategies.

1.7. Significance of the Study in Modern Social Work Education

This study holds significant value in the realm of modern social work education, primarily due to its potential to enhance the quality and relevance of social work training in a global context. By conducting a comparative analysis of African and U.S. social work education systems, the study aims to identify and integrate diverse educational practices and perspectives. This approach is crucial in an increasingly interconnected world, where social workers are often required to address complex, cross-cultural issues. The insights gained from this study will contribute to the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive curricula, which are essential for preparing social workers to effectively serve diverse populations. Additionally, the study's focus on bridging educational methodologies between different regions promotes a more collaborative and global approach to social work education. This is particularly important in fostering mutual understanding and respect among social work professionals worldwide. Ultimately, the study's outcomes are expected to influence policy and practice in social work education, leading to more adaptable, responsive, and globally-informed social work professionals who are better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

2. Methodology

2.1. Methodological Approach for Comparative Educational Analysis

The methodological approach for comparative educational analysis in social work education is a critical aspect of this study, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational systems in different cultural and regional contexts. This section will explore the methodologies and techniques used in comparative educational analysis, drawing on the insights provided by the selected references.

Kuklin (2015) discusses the importance of comparative evaluation in educational systems, emphasizing the need for a theoretically justified approach. The study highlights the use of various ranking and monitoring procedures, which are crucial in assessing the effectiveness of educational systems. This approach is particularly relevant for comparing social work education across different regions, as it allows for an objective evaluation of educational outcomes and methodologies.

Acar and Polat (2023) provide an analysis of social work education in Turkey, examining the educational trends and socio-political context through a historical lens. Their methodology includes a systematic review of literature and semi-structured interviews with key informants, offering a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of social work education. This approach is instrumental in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in social work education in different cultural contexts.

Saleebey (1996) looked at the strengths perspective in social work practice as it continues to develop conceptually. The strengths-based approach to case management with people with severe mental illness was well established. He asserted that more recently, there have been developments in strengths-based practice with other client groups and the emergence of strengths orientations in work with communities. To augment these developments, converging lines of thinking, research, and practice in areas such as developmental resilience, healing and wellness, and constructionist narrative and story have provided interesting supports and challenges to the strengths perspective. He reviews some current thinking and research about using a strengths orientation and assesses conceptual endorsements and criticisms of the strengths perspective.

Kourgiantakis et al. (2020) present a scoping review on the use of simulation in social work education. The review follows a structured methodology, including the selection of relevant studies and the identification of emerging best practices. This approach is significant for understanding how innovative teaching methods, such as simulation, can be integrated into social work education, enhancing the learning experience for students.

The methodological approach for comparative educational analysis in social work education involves a combination of theoretical justification, systematic literature review, interviews, and innovative teaching methods. These methodologies provide a robust framework for comparing and evaluating social work education systems in different cultural and regional contexts. By employing these approaches, the study aims to identify best practices and challenges in social work education, contributing to the development of more effective and culturally sensitive educational models.

3. Results

3.1. Curriculum Design and Pedagogy in African Social Work Education

The curriculum design and pedagogy in African social work education are critical components that shape the effectiveness and relevance of social work practice in the African context. This section explores the current trends, challenges, and innovations in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches in African social work education, drawing on insights from the selected references.

Mathebane and Sekudu (2018) highlight the need for decolonising the social work curriculum in South Africa. They argue that the current curriculum, characterized by Eurocentric hegemony, fails to reflect the African worldview and cultural realities. The authors advocate for a curriculum that is Afrocentric, culturally relative, and inclusive of diverse knowledge systems found in South Africa. This approach is essential for producing social workers who are equipped to address the unique social challenges within the African context.

Onalu and Ingram (2023) discuss the influence of Western pedagogy and knowledge on the development of social work education in Nigeria. Their findings reveal that the Nigerian social work curriculum and pedagogical practices are

predominantly Western-centric, which often fails to address the specific cultural and societal needs of Nigeria. The authors recommend a transformation towards an Afro-centric curriculum that integrates indigenous knowledge and culture, ensuring that social work education is culturally and nationally compatible.

Ekoh and Agbawodikeizu (2023) explore the ethical issues arising from the indigenisation of social work education in Nigeria. They identify challenges such as discriminatory practices and cultural biases that may emerge in the process of Africanising the curriculum. The study emphasizes the importance of reconciling ethical and cultural differences in curriculum design, ensuring that social work education is both locally relevant and ethically sound.

The curriculum design and pedagogy in African social work education require a careful balance between incorporating indigenous knowledge and cultural realities, and adhering to ethical principles and global social work standards. The move towards an Afro-centric curriculum should be accompanied by continuous evaluation and adaptation to ensure that it meets the evolving needs of African societies. By addressing these challenges, African social work education can produce competent and culturally sensitive social workers who are capable of effectively serving their communities.

3.2. Community Engagement and Fieldwork in African Social Work Training

Community engagement and fieldwork are integral components of social work training, providing students with practical experience and a deeper understanding of the communities they serve. In the context of African social work education, these aspects take on unique dimensions, reflecting the diverse social, cultural, and economic realities of the continent. This section explores the approaches, challenges, and innovations in community engagement and fieldwork in African social work training, drawing insights from the selected references.

Maistry (2012) examines the role of community engagement and service learning at South African universities, focusing on the University of Fort Hare. The study highlights the importance of integrating student social responsibility into social work education. It emphasizes the need for educational institutions to establish a reciprocal relationship with the community, ensuring that the learning process is not only academically enriching but also socially relevant and beneficial to the community.

Al-Makhamreh, Alnabulsi, and Asfour (2016) discuss innovative field training methods in Jordan, which foster undergraduate social work students' abilities to empower local communities and address environmental issues. The study showcases a student self-directed approach to fieldwork, where students engage in community assessments and develop interventions. This method cultivates culturally competent practices and sustainable development, providing evidence-based knowledge on social work practice involving environmental issues.

Canavera and Akesson (2020) explore the conceptualization and practice of supervision during social work education and training in Francophone West Africa, specifically in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. The study notes the centrality of fieldwork in training and the reliance on faculty-field liaisons. It reveals a hybridization of 'harder' regulatory supervision with 'softer' mentoring approaches, indicating a shift towards more supportive and developmental forms of supervision in fieldwork.

Community engagement and fieldwork in African social work training are evolving to meet the specific needs of African communities. These approaches emphasize student empowerment, community involvement, cultural competence, and sustainable development. The integration of innovative training methods and supportive supervision models is crucial for preparing social work students to effectively address the complex challenges faced by African communities. By focusing on these aspects, African social work education can produce skilled and socially responsible professionals who are capable of making a significant impact in their communities.

3.3. Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Social Work

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into social work education represents a critical step towards culturally responsive and effective social work practice. This approach acknowledges the rich diversity of knowledge systems that exist globally, particularly in African societies. Indigenous knowledge, often passed down through generations, encompasses a wide range of understandings about social relationships, environmental stewardship, and community well-being. By incorporating these systems into social work education, practitioners are better equipped to understand and address the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Masoga and Shokane (2019) emphasize the importance of IKS in environmental social work education. Their research highlights how indigenous communities have historically utilized their knowledge systems for sustainable living and environmental management. Integrating these practices into social work education not only enriches the curriculum

but also aligns social work practices with the principles of environmental sustainability. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Global South, where the connection between communities and their natural environment is often profound and intrinsic.

Chilvers (2022) explores the integration of indigenous knowledge in field education, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study underscores the challenges of transcending the dominance of Western pedagogical models. It advocates for the inclusion of indigenous models of practice and cultural perspectives in social work education. This approach is vital for ensuring that social work practice is not only technically proficient but also culturally sensitive and aligned with the values and beliefs of indigenous communities.

Nnama-Okechukwu and Mclaughlin (2022) delve into the Nigerian context, where social work education is predominantly influenced by Western ideologies, often at the expense of indigenous knowledge. Their study calls for a balanced approach that integrates both Western and indigenous knowledge systems. Such an approach would prevent the marginalization of indigenous perspectives and ensure that social work education in Nigeria is both locally relevant and globally competent.

The integration of IKS in social work education is not without its challenges. One significant hurdle is the potential conflict between traditional practices and modern social work ethics and standards. Educators and practitioners must navigate these complexities carefully, ensuring that the integration of indigenous knowledge does not compromise professional ethics or the efficacy of social work interventions.

Another challenge lies in the documentation and formalization of indigenous knowledge, which is often oral and experiential in nature. Transforming these knowledge systems into formal educational content requires careful consideration and collaboration with indigenous communities. This process must be undertaken with sensitivity and respect for the cultural and intellectual property rights of these communities.

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in social work education is essential for developing a more holistic, culturally competent, and effective social work practice. This approach not only enriches the educational experience of social work students but also ensures that social work practice is deeply rooted in the cultural and social realities of the communities it aims to serve. As the field of social work continues to evolve, the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems will play a pivotal role in shaping a more inclusive and responsive profession.

3.4. Case Studies: Innovative Educational Practices in African Countries

The landscape of social work education in Africa is evolving, with innovative practices emerging to address the unique challenges and opportunities in the region. This section examines case studies from Ghana, Francophone African countries, and Southern Africa to illustrate these developments.

In Ghana, Tlili, Ofosu, and Zhang (2021) explore the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in enhancing teaching practices and pedagogical beliefs. Their study reveals that while Ghanaian educators hold positive views about OER and incorporate them into their teaching, challenges such as intellectual property concerns and difficulty in finding appropriate OER persist. This case study underscores the potential of OER in democratizing access to education and facilitating knowledge sharing, which is crucial in the context of social work education.

Zanchetta et al. (2022) provide insights into the role of health promoters in school settings across Francophone African countries. Their research highlights the importance of mobilizing community resources and assets in health promotion initiatives. This approach is significant for social work education as it emphasizes the role of social workers in leveraging community strengths and resources for health and well-being, a key aspect of social work practice.

Nhapi and Dhemba (2020) discuss the embedding of the developmental approach in social work education and practice in Southern Africa. Their study focuses on addressing poverty and socio-economic transformation through social work. This case study is particularly relevant as it showcases how social work education can be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in poverty eradication. The developmental approach, which emphasizes the socio-economic empowerment of communities, is a critical aspect of social work education in regions grappling with poverty and inequality.

These case studies collectively highlight the diverse and context-specific innovations in social work education across Africa. They demonstrate the importance of adapting educational practices to local contexts and challenges, whether it's through the use of technology, community engagement, or aligning with broader developmental goals. The

integration of these innovative practices in social work education not only enriches the learning experience but also ensures that social work graduates are equipped to address the complex and varied needs of African societies.

Moreover, these case studies illustrate the importance of collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches in social work education. The involvement of various stakeholders, including educators, health promoters, community leaders, and policy makers, is crucial in developing and implementing effective educational practices. This collaboration is essential for creating a holistic and integrated approach to social work education, which is responsive to the multifaceted nature of social challenges in Africa.

The case studies from Ghana, Francophone Africa, and Southern Africa provide valuable insights into the innovative practices shaping social work education on the continent. These practices reflect a commitment to contextual relevance, community engagement, and the pursuit of social justice, all of which are central to the ethos of social work. As social work education continues to evolve in Africa, these innovative approaches offer pathways for preparing social workers who are not only skilled practitioners but also agents of change in their communities.

3.4.1. Comparative Analysis: African vs. Western Social Work Training Models

The comparison between African and Western social work training models reveals significant differences in pedagogical approaches, influenced by cultural, economic, and social factors.

Canavera and Akesson (2020) provide insights into the training models in Francophone West Africa, particularly in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Their study highlights a strong emphasis on fieldwork and faculty-field liaisons, with a focus on compliance and regulatory supervision. This contrasts with many Western models, where there is often a greater emphasis on theoretical learning and less direct oversight in fieldwork.

Mugumbate and Chereni (2020) discuss the incorporation of the Ubuntu theory in social work, a concept deeply rooted in African philosophy. This approach, which emphasizes communal values, interconnectedness, and mutual support, differs significantly from Western models that often prioritize individualism and self-reliance. The Ubuntu theory's integration into social work education underscores the importance of cultural relevance in training models.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted differences in social work education across regions. As noted by Mutemi, Kang'ethe, and Murote (2020) the pandemic's impact on African institutions revealed challenges in online teaching and learning, particularly in rural areas with limited resources. This situation contrasts with many Western institutions, which were better equipped for the sudden shift to digital learning.

Taylor-Beswick (2023) emphasizes the need for digitalizing social work education to meet the demands of the 21st century. This need is particularly acute in African contexts, where the digital divide poses significant challenges to implementing technology-driven educational models. The study suggests that integrating digital capabilities into the curriculum is crucial for preparing students for contemporary practice needs.

3.4.2. Role of Technology and Digital Learning in African Social Work Education

The role of technology in African social work education is evolving, with digital learning becoming increasingly important. Taylor-Beswick's (2023) research underscores the need for social work education to adapt to digital advancements. This adaptation is crucial in African contexts, where technological infrastructure may lag behind that of Western countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online learning in social work education, as noted by Mutemi and Kang'ethe (2020). However, the transition has been challenging due to resource constraints, highlighting the need for more robust support systems and infrastructure to facilitate effective digital learning.

Canavera and Akesson (2020) also touch upon the role of technology in enhancing fieldwork supervision and training in West Africa. The use of digital tools can improve communication and collaboration between students, faculty, and field supervisors, although this requires investment in technological resources and training.

The comparative analysis of African and Western social work training models, along with the role of technology in African social work education, reveals a landscape of diverse practices shaped by cultural, economic, and technological factors. These differences and challenges present opportunities for innovation and collaboration, with the potential to enrich social work education and practice across global contexts.

3.4.3. Challenges and Barriers in African Social Work Education

African social work education faces a myriad of challenges and barriers, impacting its effectiveness and reach. Mwansa (2010) highlights the lack of a centralized organization to oversee social work education in Africa as a significant impediment. Unlike other regions with established bodies like the International Association of Schools of Social Work, Africa lacks a similar entity to guide and standardize social work education. This absence hinders the development of a cohesive and robust educational framework, essential for training competent social workers equipped with relevant knowledge, skills, and technologies.

Raniga and Zelnick (2014) discuss the challenges faced in aligning social policy education with the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. Their study, based on South African student perspectives, reveals difficulties in integrating global social work agendas with local educational practices. This misalignment often results in educational programs that are not fully responsive to the unique social challenges faced in African contexts, such as poverty, unemployment, and the impact of HIV/AIDS.

Shokane, Makhubele and Blitz (2018) address the issues around aligning theory, research, and practice in social work education, with a focus on an Afrocentric approach. The book reflects on the dynamic nature of social work as a profession and discipline, emphasizing the need for education and training to meet the challenges of societies in transition, like South Africa. The authors argue for curricular changes that respond to local realities and contribute to the decolonization of social work teaching and practice. However, achieving this alignment is fraught with challenges, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for a more inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum.

The challenges and barriers in African social work education are multifaceted, ranging from organizational and structural issues to the need for curriculum reform that aligns with both global standards and local realities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the development of a social work education system in Africa that is both globally informed and locally relevant, capable of producing social workers who can effectively address the continent's unique social issues.

4. Discussion

4.1. Adapting African Educational Models in U.S. Social Work Training

The integration of African educational models into U.S. social work training represents a significant stride towards a more inclusive and globally aware educational framework. Dababnah et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of incorporating global social work concepts into curricula to enhance the educational experience and understanding of practice, policy, and research for students. This approach is particularly relevant in social work, where practitioners often engage with diverse populations and complex social issues. The inclusion of African educational models can provide U.S. social work students with a broader perspective, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to address the needs of diverse communities effectively.

African educational models, characterized by their emphasis on community engagement, holistic approaches, and integration of indigenous knowledge, offer valuable insights for U.S. social work training. According to Shao (2016), a cosmopolitan social justice approach to education, which includes respect for cultural diversity and an understanding of global interconnectedness, is crucial in today's educational landscape. This approach aligns with the principles of African educational models, which prioritize community-oriented and culturally relevant practices.

Moreover, the adaptation of African educational models in U.S. training programs can foster a deeper understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. Joseph (2012) highlights the cultural transitions experienced by African American women in STEM fields, underscoring the importance of cultural competency in education. By integrating African educational models, U.S. social work programs can better prepare students to navigate and respect cultural differences, ultimately leading to more effective and empathetic social work practice.

4.1.1. Cultural Competency and Diversity in U.S. Social Work Education

Cultural competency and diversity are essential components of effective social work education and practice. The adaptation of African educational models in U.S. social work training can significantly enhance these aspects. Johnson et al. (2013) discuss the importance of multicultural awareness and competence in counselor education, which is equally applicable to social work. By incorporating African educational models, U.S. social work programs can provide

students with a more comprehensive understanding of multiculturalism and the skills to work effectively with diverse populations.

African educational models often incorporate a strong emphasis on understanding and respecting cultural differences, which is crucial in social work practice. Dababnah et al. (2016) note that faculty members with international experience, including those with experience in African contexts, can bring valuable perspectives to social work education. These perspectives can help students understand the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in their practice.

Furthermore, the integration of African educational models can challenge and expand the traditional Western-centric curriculum, offering a more balanced and inclusive approach. Shao (2016) advocates for an educational approach that respects cultural diversity and promotes social justice, principles that are deeply embedded in African educational models. This approach can help U.S. social work students develop a more nuanced understanding of global issues and the role of culture in shaping human experiences.

Adapting African educational models in U.S. social work training can provide significant benefits in terms of enhancing cultural competency and diversity. This integration can prepare social work students to be more effective, empathetic, and culturally aware practitioners, equipped to meet the challenges of a diverse and globalized world.

4.2. Ethical Considerations in Cross-Cultural Education Exchange

Ethical considerations in cross-cultural education exchange are pivotal in shaping the landscape of social work training. The complexities of ethical practice in a global context require a nuanced understanding of cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, and human dignity. Hamilton et al. (2023) highlight the ethical challenges presented when North American social work students, often from different cultural backgrounds, interact with vulnerable populations abroad. The study underscores the importance of confidentiality and the preservation of human dignity, especially in the context of social media use during study abroad programs. This perspective is crucial in ensuring that cross-cultural exchanges in social work education are conducted with the utmost respect for the dignity and worth of all individuals involved.

The ethical dilemmas in cross-cultural education are further complicated when considering the indigenization of social work education in different cultural contexts. Ekoh and Agbawodikeizu (2023) explore the ethical issues arising in the Nigerian context, where efforts to indigenize social work education may inadvertently perpetuate discriminatory and oppressive practices. This research brings to light the ethical tensions between adhering to local cultural norms and upholding the universal principles of social work, such as non-discrimination and respect for diversity. The findings from this study emphasize the need for social work educators to reconcile ethical and cultural differences to prepare future practitioners for ethically sound practice in diverse settings.

The ethical considerations in cross-cultural education exchange extend beyond the classroom to the fieldwork and community engagement aspects of social work training. The interaction between students and diverse client populations presents unique challenges and learning opportunities. Educators must equip students with the skills to navigate these complexities, fostering an environment of critical reflection and ethical decision-making. This approach is essential in preparing social work students to deal with the ethical complexities of cultural relativism, humanitarian evangelism, and risk management in a global context.

Moreover, the ethical dimensions of cross-cultural education in social work training call for a critical examination of power relations between social workers and client populations. As highlighted by Hamilton et al. (2023), social work education must center the dignity and best interests of vulnerable populations, particularly in international settings. This focus requires a shift from a static, relativist philosophical framework to a dynamic, relationist approach that explicitly examines group power relations within practice contexts.

In addition, the ethical considerations in cross-cultural education exchange necessitate a transformational and political education approach. This approach involves moving beyond procedural knowledge transfer to facilitating the acquisition of ethical knowledge as a process of critical education. Such an approach promotes personal and professional transformation, enabling social work students to engage ethically and effectively in diverse cultural settings.

Ethical considerations in cross-cultural education exchange are integral to the development of competent and culturally sensitive social work practitioners. The challenges and opportunities presented in this context require a comprehensive approach that includes respect for cultural diversity, critical reflection, and ethical decision-making. By addressing these

ethical considerations, social work education can prepare students for the complexities of practice in a globalized world, ensuring that they uphold the values of dignity, respect, and social justice in all their professional endeavors.

4.2.1. Strategies for Implementing African-Inspired Methods in U.S. Training

Implementing African-inspired methods in U.S. social work training requires a nuanced understanding of both African and Western educational paradigms. Singh, Gumz, and Crawley (2011) highlight the importance of contextualizing social work education within the cultural and societal norms of the region it serves. This approach is crucial when considering the integration of African methods into U.S. training programs. The authors argue for a model that respects and incorporates the unique cultural, historical, and social contexts of African communities, suggesting that such an approach can enrich U.S. social work education by providing a more global perspective (Singh, Gumz, & Crawley, 2011).

Singh (2014) further explores the outcomes of anti-racist social work education, which is highly relevant when discussing the incorporation of African methods into U.S. curricula. Anti-racist education, which involves understanding and challenging systemic racism, can be a cornerstone of implementing African-inspired methods. This approach not only addresses the cultural and historical aspects of African communities but also aligns with the broader goals of social justice and equity in social work practice. Singh's research underscores the need for U.S. social work education to be reflexive and responsive to diverse cultural narratives, including those from African contexts.

MacLean et al. (2023) provide insights into the effectiveness of Indigenous Cultural Safety Training for health and social work professionals. Their scoping review emphasizes the importance of culturally safe practices, which are essential when integrating African methodologies into U.S. training. This training involves understanding the impact of colonization, recognizing power imbalances, and developing respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities. By extension, similar principles can be applied when adopting African-inspired methods in U.S. social work education, ensuring that these methods are not just transplanted but are adapted respectfully and effectively.

Frie (2019) discusses the role of social sciences in higher education and training, particularly in the context of German-African cooperation in global health. The study highlights the significance of interdisciplinary approaches and the inclusion of social sciences in developing effective training programs. This perspective is valuable for U.S. social work training, as it suggests a multidisciplinary approach to integrating African methods, involving not just social work theories but also insights from anthropology, sociology, and other relevant fields.

The implementation of African-inspired methods in U.S. social work training can be approached through several strategies. Firstly, curriculum development should involve a collaborative process with African educators and practitioners. This collaboration ensures authenticity and cultural relevance in the content being integrated. Secondly, fieldwork and practical training components should include opportunities for students to engage with African communities, either locally or through international partnerships. Such experiences provide firsthand understanding of the cultural contexts in which these methods are rooted.

Additionally, training programs should include comprehensive modules on African history, cultural practices, and social issues. This foundational knowledge is crucial for students to appreciate the nuances of African social work methods. Furthermore, incorporating case studies and examples from African contexts in classroom discussions can provide practical insights and foster a deeper understanding of the applicability of these methods in diverse settings.

Finally, ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of these integrated methods. This process should involve both educators and students, ensuring that the curriculum remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of the field.

The integration of African-inspired methods into U.S. social work training requires a thoughtful and comprehensive approach. It involves not only the adaptation of educational content but also a deep commitment to understanding and respecting the cultural, historical, and social contexts of African communities. By adopting such strategies, U.S. social work education can become more inclusive, diverse, and effective in preparing practitioners for a globalized world.

4.3. Future Directions for U.S.-Africa Collaboration in Social Work Education

The evolving landscape of social work education, influenced by globalization and the interplay of diverse cultural contexts, necessitates a forward-looking approach to U.S.-Africa collaboration in this field. The exportation of U.S. social work education models to different cultural contexts, such as those in Africa, has been met with mixed success (Singh, Gumz, and Crawley, 2011). This underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the local contexts and the development of collaborative models that respect and integrate indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

The future of social work education, as envisioned by leaders in the field, suggests a shift towards more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and globally aware curricula (Robbins et al., 2016). This vision aligns with the need for U.S.-Africa collaboration in social work education to move beyond a unidirectional transfer of knowledge. Instead, it should foster a reciprocal exchange where both U.S. and African educational institutions and practitioners learn from each other's experiences and perspectives.

School social work practice, a vital component of the broader field, also reflects these evolving trends. The future directions based on present conditions indicate a growing emphasis on understanding the impact of social work practice in diverse educational settings (Kelly, Frey, and Anderson-Butcher, 2010). This is particularly relevant for U.S.-Africa collaborations, where educational systems and challenges can vary significantly.

To effectively collaborate, U.S. and African institutions must engage in joint curriculum development initiatives that incorporate local realities and global best practices. This approach would help in creating programs that are not only culturally relevant but also globally competent. Such initiatives could involve faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and shared online platforms for knowledge exchange.

Technology will play a crucial role in shaping the future of U.S.-Africa collaboration in social work education. The use of digital platforms can facilitate cross-continental dialogues, webinars, and virtual classrooms, making education more accessible and inclusive. This technological integration should be designed to enhance, not replace, the rich cultural and experiential learning that is fundamental to social work education.

Another key area for future collaboration is in the field of research. Joint research initiatives can focus on issues that are pertinent to both U.S. and African contexts, such as poverty alleviation, community development, and mental health. These collaborative research projects can provide valuable insights and contribute to the global body of knowledge in social work.

Finally, the future of U.S.-Africa collaboration in social work education must be underpinned by a commitment to ethical practice and mutual respect. This involves recognizing and valuing the unique contributions of each partner, avoiding any form of neo-colonialism in the guise of educational collaboration. It also means ensuring that the collaboration is beneficial to all parties involved, particularly in enhancing the quality and relevance of social work education for students and practitioners in both the U.S. and Africa.

The future of U.S.-Africa collaboration in social work education holds great potential. By embracing a collaborative, culturally sensitive, and technologically integrated approach, this partnership can significantly contribute to the advancement of social work education and practice, ultimately leading to more effective social services and better outcomes for communities in both regions.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This study embarked on an ambitious journey to bridge the methodologies of social work education between Africa and the United States, a venture rooted in the recognition of the rich diversity and potential synergies between these two distinct educational paradigms. The aim was to not only understand but also integrate the best practices from both systems, fostering a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach to social work education.

The methodology adopted was a comparative educational analysis, eschewing traditional fieldwork and statistical analysis in favor of a comprehensive literature review and case study examination. This approach enabled a deep dive into the nuances of social work education across different cultural contexts, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities inherent in integrating these systems.

Key findings of this study revealed significant differences in curriculum design, pedagogy, and the role of community engagement and indigenous knowledge in social work training. African social work education, with its emphasis on community-centric approaches and integration of local cultural practices, offers valuable insights that can enhance the U.S. social work educational framework. Conversely, the technological advancements and structured methodologies prevalent in U.S. training programs provide a model for enhancing the efficiency and reach of African social work education.

The study concludes that a collaborative, reciprocal approach to social work education can yield substantial benefits for both regions. By embracing the strengths of each system, future social work practitioners can be better equipped to

address the challenges of a globalized world. This requires not only the integration of diverse educational practices but also a commitment to ongoing dialogue and mutual respect between U.S. and African educational institutions.

Recommendations include the development of joint curriculum initiatives, faculty exchange programs, and collaborative research projects focused on global social work challenges. The future of social work education, as envisioned in this study, is one where cross-cultural learning and cooperation are not just ideals but integral components of a globally competent social work education system.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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