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Ubuntu as an emancipatory framework for teaching and learning in Social Work: a narrative literature review

Thembelihle B. MAKHANYA and Bongane M. MZINYANE

ABSTRACT

Due to the fact that it focuses on collectiveness, togetherness, and justice for all, Ubuntu, embodies a transformed and Afro-sensed approach to the processes of teaching and learning. This is particularly vital for social work education because it locates the academic journey of a student within a critical, interactive, and socially engaged paradigm, which is aligned with the values of the wider African society. Through the lenses of Afrocentrism, emancipatory approach and narrative literature review processes, this article uncovers the nexus of Ubuntu and social work in teaching and learning, within a South African context. The discussions draw conclusions that the idea of people's existence cannot be separated from those around them, thus social work students, exist as a significant part of others. Essentially, this article magnifies the traits of humanitarianism and positive communitarianism within the philosophy of Ubuntu, which can be useful for social work education. Social work teaching and learning need to be the reflection of such harmony, shared morality, oneness, and togetherness for the re-distribution of justice in communities. Most fundamentally, this article emphasises the importance of the philosophy of Ubuntu which needs not only to guide social work practice but also social work education through teaching and learning.

KEY TERMS: Ubuntu philosophy, emancipatory, teaching and learning, social work

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Author/s details:

Thembelihle, B. Makhanya

Bongane, M. Mzinyane

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INTRODUCTION

The generational and axiomatic hegemony of ideologies and identities of the Euro-North American superpowers into different sectors of the global society has resulted in a point where African values, epistemologies, and knowledge systems are being systematically suppressed, for a long time (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Masoga, Shokane & Gross, 2021). Heleta (2016) labels the existing epistemic hegemony, against African values, as the 'epistemic violence' towards African knowledge systems. In turn, he calls for the decolonization of African higher education, through the embracement of African values such as Ubuntu amongst other indigenous values (Heleta, 2016; Makhanya, 2022). Social work education is not immune from the cultural identities and societal realities of students and educators, as a result, Ubuntu is an important African value that must be integral to the processes of teaching and learning in South Africa and beyond. Specifically, this article illuminates the nexus of Ubuntu philosophy and social work teaching and learning, within a South African context. It also adopted the narrative literature review method to emphasize the value of Afrocentric and emancipatory frameworks such as Ubuntu, which should be integrated intentionally into social work education. Through the lenses of Afrocentrism and emancipatory approaches, this article illuminates the nexus of Ubuntu philosophy and social work education. The article starts by presenting the methodology adopted for the discussions. Thereafter it provides the colonial background of Africa which dismantled African values and knowledge systems. It goes further to conceptualize Ubuntu as an Afrocentric framework. It also presents a discussion on Ubuntu as a liberating framework of teaching and learning in social work. Lastly, the article positions Ubuntu as a relevant value of social work education in a South African context.

BACKGROUND

Despite the reality that Ubuntu philosophy is gaining global recognition (cf. van Breda 2019), the historical positionality of Africa has impeded the maximum integration of this African epistemic value in higher education because of the existing systems, within higher education, that are based on Western ideologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Makhanya, 2021a). The legacy of colonialism in the African continent left divisions and alienations which were passively against the oneness of people. Praeg (2017); Chinhanu and Adebawo (2020) both revealed that the growing globalisation and internationalization have passively compelled people to fit into one cultural box based on the parameters of Western society, as former colonizers and current economic superpowers.

There is a plethora of scholarly arguments about the effects of colonialism and the current neoliberalism on Africa (cf. Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Sewpaul, 2010; Masoga, Shokane & Gross, 2021). There are also growing calls for the Africanization, indigenization, and decolonization of Africa in all aspects of life, including higher education (cf. Harms-Smith & Matlapule, 2018; Makhanya & Zibane 2020; Makhanya, 2021a). One of the examples is Sewpaul (2010), who states that Africa has been a subject of colonialism and ongoing neoliberal imperialism. Heleta (2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) also posit that the existing epistemic hegemony can be traced back to colonialism and imperialism, which were eras characterized by forced domination and oppression by the Euro-North American superpowers (Makhanya, 2021b). Moreover, Chinhanu and Adebawo (2020) suggest that 'the teacher and her students must find values which they must commit to promoting and protecting to realize human culture'. This means that the cultural values of students and educators in higher education, cannot be alienated from the mindset of those involved in teaching and learning (Masuku and Makhanya, 2023). Ubuntu is one of these African values that are being axiologically studied for integration.

Specific to social work education, Makhanya (2022) acknowledges the dominance of Western values and ideologies, in social work education, which in turn suppresses the institutionalization of African values such as Ubuntu. As a result, some South African scholars emphasize the importance of popularizing Ubuntu in African social work education (Mugumbate & Nyangura, 2013; van Breda, 2019; Makhanya, 2022; Makhanya 2023). On this note, van Breda (2019) makes a call that the Ubuntu philosophy needs to be developed as an African theory for social work practice. Additionally, there have been calls for the utilization of Ubuntu philosophy as a liberating framework in social work and other social science disciplines (Chigangaidze, 2022). Lefa (2015) argues that Ubuntu is the philosophy that lies not only in an African way of life and well-being but on values of sharing, harmony and interdependence. Ubuntu emphasizes the value of 'being human through other people' Mugumbate and Nyangura (2013: 83). The philosophy of Ubuntu focuses on the accommodation of other cultures and identities, which is also aligned with social work principles and values, it can also offer a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning in the context of higher education means the educational engagement between the student and the academic/lecturer/teacher and all activities, tasks, assessments and engagement for knowledge exchange. Sequeira (2012, cited in Munna & Kalam, 2021: 1) argues that "learning can be considered as change that is permanent in nature because change is brought into students by a teacher through techniques like developing specific skills, changing some attitudes, or understanding specific scientific law operating behind a learning environment". This suggests that the interaction between student and teacher is an instrument for change. This

article calls for Ubuntu philosophy as an Afrocentric worldview of humanitarianism to be the instrument that guides change in the teaching and learning of social work.

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014) define social work as a:

English: Practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being.

KiSwahili: Kazi ya kijamii ni uwanja unaohusisha kazi ya vitendo, mafunzo ya elimu ambayo yanakuza mabadiliko ya kijamii na maendeleo ya jamii, mshikamano wa kijamii, motisha na uhuru wa watu. Misingi ya haki, haki za binadamu, ushiriki, na heshima kwa tofauti za rangi ni vipaumbele katika sekta ya kijamii. Kwa msaada wa mawazo tofauti na muhimu ya ustawi, ustawi, ujuzi wa kijamii, ubinadamu, na ujuzi wa asili, huduma za kijamii huunganisha watu na miundo inayopambana na matatizo ya maisha na kuboresha afya kwa ujumla.

IsiZulu: Ezenhlalakahle ziwumkhakha ombandakanya ukwenza umsebenzi ophathe kayo, uqeqes ho lweze mfundo olukhuthaza uguquko lwezenhlalo nokuthuthukiswa komphakathi, ubumbano lomphakathi, ukugququze la nokukhulule ka kwabantu. Imigomo yobulungiswa, amalungelo esintu, ukubamba iqhaza, nokuhlonipha ukwehlukana kwezinhlanga kuse qhulwini emkhakheni weze nhlalakahle. Ngokusekelwa imibono ehluakhlake neyeze nhlalakahle, ubuchwepheshe beze nhlalo, ubuntu, nolwazi loMdabu, ezenhlalakahle zixhumanisa abantu nezakhiwo ezilwisana nezingqinamba zempilo ziphinde zithuthukise nempilo jikelele.

By its definition, social work focuses on humanity and harmony in people's existence through the collective frameworks of equality, inclusivity and justice for all. Hence the call for Ubuntu philosophy in social work teaching and learning is crucial (Makhanya 2023). It is therefore against this background that the use of Ubuntu must be maximized.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopted the narrative literature review approach. This approach, also known as traditional literature review, was adopted for its stance on critical and objective analysis of the existing knowledge (Baker, 2016). Herein the focus was on Ubuntu, social work, teaching and learning and other aspects of the article discussions. Thus, the published work on the area of the topic was examined to guide the discussions. As suggested by Green, Johnson and Adams (2006), the general guidelines followed in the process of reviewing literature included preparation, where authors conducted a preliminary search of existing research on the topic. This process assisted with refining the topic and study objective. It also aided with the advanced search, examination of literature and general guidelines and article writing in relation to the journal requirements. This process assisted in categorically classifying and justifying the databases that were selected, the years that were sampled, the types of articles that were selected, and the keywords that were utilized. Specifically, the keywords (as detailed in the abstract section) were selected. The titles, abstracts and conclusions of the retrieved articles, book chapters, and books were screened, after which the full texts of potentially relevant articles were read, analysed and synthesized. Studies that focused on social work education and Afrocentricity were also included. The search was based on scientific databases such as AJOL, Google Scholar, and SCIELO. These databases were selected for their richness of scholarly articles and specificity to Africa and beyond. The search sampled papers that fall within the last 20 years, spanning between 2003 and 2023 aligned with the maturity of South Africa's democratic era. An exception was given to the older sentimental work of Gramsci, Freire and Biko. This was intentional in order to position and review recent developments on the theory and use of Ubuntu in social work within the works of scholars who believed in emancipatory frameworks.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the authors chronologically present findings and discussions, based on a narrative literature review process on Ubuntu as an Afrocentric paradigm and its components; Ubuntu as a liberating/emancipatory framework in teaching and learning; critical analysis of Ubuntu philosophy: decolonising theory grid; and the relevance of Ubuntu in the context of social work education in South Africa. The discussions aim to mainstream Ubuntu philosophy as an African worldview to guide teaching and learning in social work.

Ubuntu as an Afrocentric paradigm and its components

The positionality of Ubuntu within the Afrocentric paradigm is an important point of departure for this section. It is important to note that Ubuntu brings crucial elements that are needed in African development. But most notably, is the ability of Ubuntu to bring sensitivity to the disadvantaging historical conditions of the continent of Africa. Chigangaidze (2022:291) argues that “Ubuntu is an African philosophy that is based on humanness, kindness, communality, socio-structural issues such as social justice, and human rights”. According to Praeg (2017: 295), Ubuntu can be framed using two domains, namely, “African humanism and or African communitarianism”. Humanism focuses on harmony, friendliness, love, forgiveness etc. Humanism is based on disavowing violence. Communitarians focus on the common good beyond the individual.

Mubecua and David (2022: 3) explicate a number of etiological assumptions about the concept of Ubuntu. Some of the connotations that are cited by Mubecua and David (2022) include the work of scholars such as Lodge (1998) and Meintjes (2021) who argue that the documentation of Ubuntu can be traced back to the African works of the 1950s (ibid). While on the other hand, Gede (2011) cited in Mubecua and David (2022: 3) argues that the literature on Ubuntu can be traced back to the African literature of the 1800s. Most important, Mubecua and David (2022) confirm that despite the divergent views on the historiography and documentation of the concept and meaning of Ubuntu but they all agree that this concept is African and it existed as a value of Africans for the longest time. It became eminent that there is no one definition of Ubuntu, but the concept is linked to African people and claimed for diverse African tribes.

According to Battle (1996: 99) the concept of Ubuntu originates from the Xhosa expression ‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu’, which means that each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others. Ubuntu consists of the prefix ubu-and the stem ntu-ubu which evokes ‘the idea of being’ in general (Battle, 1996). Thus, ubu-ntu is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people (Battle, 1996). Khoza (2005:269) defines Ubuntu as “an African value system that means humanness or being human, a worldview characterised by such values as caring, sharing, compassion, communalism, communocracy and related predispositions.”

On the other hand, Baumann (2015) then relates Ubuntu to other African frameworks such as the Ma’at framework. According to Baumann (2015), the Ma’at is arguably the predecessor of Ubuntu (in the South African context) and the Ma’at concept originates from Ancient Egyptian. Although both concepts yield unity, they are none identical. Ma’at focus on “working together while Ubuntu focuses on being together” (Baumann, 2015). Ma’at is based on three modes of solidarity i.e. active, communicative and intentional (Baumann, 2015). Meaning that Ma’at encourages acting, listening and thinking for others. Similarly, to Ubuntu, Ma’at philosophy focuses on justice, balance and order. Thus, it can be argued that the Egyptian concept of Ma’at relates to the South African concept of Ubuntu. This article draws on both concepts to emphasise the broader application of mutuality in human behaviour. But since the author writes from the South African context, the Ubuntu concept shall dominate.

Ubuntu (in Nguni language) or Maat (in Egyptian language) as the African belief system (Oviawe, 2016) promotes humanity as the culture of life which works as a unifying factor that brings harmony to diverse people's identities (Lefa, 2015; Mahaye, 2018; Makhanya, 2022). The philosophy of Ubuntu is the pride and hope of the African nation. It focuses on acceptable communal ideas, identities and deeds (Magumbate & Nyaangura, 2013). Adopting this philosophy in social work education helps communities to obtain a high level of moral judgement since it encompasses the different notions that are building blocks of humanity such as spirituality, nature and culture (Mahaye, 2018). Ubuntu allows education to be viewed as a means not of serving the market but of servicing the advancement of society by “instilling to people a broad sense of values” (Mahaye, 2018: 12). For instance, engagement of people with the environment must be the “nursery of values” through exalting the African philosophy of Ubuntu in its existence (Mahaye, 2018:13). People’s existence cannot be separated from those around them thus one exists by being included in relation with others (Mahaye, 2018). This is against the tenets of Western/Eurocentric education values of individuality that were infused in African education through coloniality (Oviawe, 2016; Makhanya & Zibane, 2020). Therefore, the exclusion of indigenous people’s experiences in interventions reflects the deficiency of borrowed educational ideologies in African philosophy. Such ideologies do not allow for Ubuntu implementation in practice. Such Western ideology also fails to acknowledge self-realization as coming from interpersonal relationships with others (Mahaye, 2018).

The interconnectedness of people and things that is appreciated by the philosophy of Ubuntu is the Afrocentric worldview to be adopted in social work in ensuring that all identities are included in knowledge creation, development and distribution (Makhanya, 2021). Thus, for the African philosophy of Ubuntu to be realised, education needs to be reformed as the “community and not the collection of individuals” (Lefa, 2015; Mahaye, 2018). This is because the philosophy of Ubuntu encourages solidarity since “it knows neither colour nor race (in today’s context), but only knows the human race as created by God” because life and learning by its nature is multicultural (Mahaye, 2018: 17). Therefore, engaging and sharing not only with others but also with the environment and nature should be valued in society through education to reflect values that are considered worthy (Mahaye, 2018).

Ubuntu as a liberating/emancipatory framework in teaching and learning

In the social sciences discipline such as social work, the emancipatory approach is a framework that focuses on the generation of scientific knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and an approach that aims to collectively challenge various forms of human oppression (Wright, 2007). The main focus is on eliminating oppression while enhancing human liberation and flourishing. For emancipation, there must be a diagnosis and critics of the current oppressive societal orders. Such diagnosis will allow for alternatives and different forms of transformation (Wright, 2007). The African liberation struggle has been the fight for emancipation and Ubuntu. The struggle calls for justice and equality- egalitarianism and humanism (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013) which are fundamentals of Ubuntu.

The emancipatory theory is rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970). There are contributions from various scholars such as Shore, Giroux, and McLaren. Freire is considered the father of liberatory pedagogy. His main idea on emancipatory pedagogy was centred around the idea that education should be transformative due to the struggles that students encounter as a result of past oppressive structures. The main focus of emancipatory pedagogy theory is on humanising society through education, creating a space where students become critical thinkers hence the rejection of the banking system of knowledge (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010). Through Ubuntu philosophy, this article adopts the various building blocks of the liberatory pedagogy namely humanisation, critical conscientisation, and rejection of the banking system.

Humanisation maintains that educators should assist students to find freedom against injustices, inequalities, and racism and break away from the image of the oppressor (Freire, 1970). Critical conscientisation requires students to learn not only about sociological implications such as injustices, racism, and inequality but to develop a critical point and adopt a stance contrary to the overly adopted one (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010). Gramsci (1971) conceptualised this process as transforming “common sense” into “good sense”. For example, during the 2015/2016 #FEESMUSTFALL students’ movements in South Africa, teaching and learning, in recognition of how oppressive the education system was, students recognised inequalities that were existing within the system, and they embarked on protests in their quest for a decolonised education (Makhanya, 2021). They argued for the banking system of knowledge to be rejected to transform education. Freire (1970) rejected the notion of best-practice and technocratic approaches. Rather, he proposed content knowledge education, which is fundamental for students’ learning (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010). This statement is the basis for his assertion on the rejection of uniform methods of education which considers teachers as experts. The banking system of knowledge undermines the students’ creative power but feeds and serves the interest of the oppressor, be it policymakers, curriculum developers, or the elite (Freire, 1970).

Ubuntu's emphasis on equality and shared humanity has profound implications for emancipatory education. Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed is closely related, as both philosophies call for the dismantling of oppressive structures in education. Ubuntu challenges power imbalances by recognizing the inherent worth of every student, irrespective of background or socio-economic status. As students engage with Ubuntu-based pedagogy, they are encouraged to question and challenge existing power dynamics. This critical consciousness, a central tenet of liberation pedagogy, empowers students to become active participants in shaping their educational experiences. Ubuntu, with its emphasis on dialogue and collective decision-making, provides a fertile ground for fostering this critical consciousness.

Given the content and context of this article, emancipatory pedagogy theory allows one to understand how Ubuntu as the method of learning and teaching within social work facilitates the process of knowledge development, critical thinking, and praxis (Makhanya, 2023). Ubuntu philosophy offers a space where students can critically reflect on their educational experiences, embedded in societal structures. By embracing Ubuntu, lecturers can create inclusive and empowering environments that prioritize the interconnectedness of individuals within a learning community. The integration of Ubuntu into social work educational practices can contribute to the development of critical consciousness among students, fostering a more equitable and just society. An emancipatory framework is thus crucial in understanding how the social/structural societal systems influence Ubuntu in social work as an African value system. Recalling the elements of Ubuntu is an emancipation of African thought and symbolises the African time of adding the face of humanity in global development (Praeg, 2017).

Critical analysis of Ubuntu philosophy: Decolonising theory grid

Examining the weaknesses of the approach that aims for human emancipation is a strength on its own. The critical analysis will anticipate the future ideology of social work intervention and suggest an alternative. The philosophy of Ubuntu also has won critics. For instance, there have been concerns about the ability of Ubuntu to be applied across cultures and universal application (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu lacks a framework (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013) and theoretical building blocks which limit the strength of Ubuntu as a value. It

is also criticized for making African societies ‘submissive and dependent’ (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013: 98). Mugumbate and Nyangura make an example with respect to authority and openness as one of the courses of colonialism. There is also an outcry for the dearth of explicit in Ubuntu and thus anticipation of a concept as a political term.

The above critics suggest a need for the decolonisation of theory and framework construction itself, to not only capture the Western criteria and parameters but also consider perspectives of other contexts, such as African worldviews. Since Ubuntu is the African viewpoint based on people’s lived experiences, which do not follow a rigid guide, like Western theories, it’s at risk of rejection. Hence the article calls for the deconstruction of theory requirements. Steve Biko (1987) also stated that writing, reading and thinking deserve high levels of emancipation. Praeg (2017: 4), argues that “when I write what I like, I believe in the emancipatory potential of thinking and writing, but when I write what I must, there is an already implicit foreboding that thinking and writing are weighed down by history and complexity to such an extent that what is being thought and written may not easily translate into an emancipatory project”. This suggests a need to value African contribution to community development and against antipathy (Praeg, 2017) of African scientific contribution to knowledge.

The critics also acknowledge that Ubuntu theory grid is framed by Western frameworks although the aim is on African liberation. It might be difficult not to frame Ubuntu using Western theoretical parameters (as the order of society), but acknowledgement of such weakness or dilemma is crucial. As argued by Praeg (2017:294) one needs to be critical about “to what extent is the framing of Ubuntu with reference to these categories and disciplinary sub-divisions not already a reiteration and perpetuation of the epistemic violence historically inflicted on Africa, of the disciplinary grid imposed on Africa in order to make it speak back in a language already familiar to the Western scholar”. The author further suggests a need not to accept the methodological grid for analysing as natural but one needs to recognise its “inescapable” problematic nature. Thus, this article agrees with Praeg (2017) that for Ubuntu to survive it must be political first before being a philosophy and/or framework of analysis. This is necessary for the acknowledgement of inherent weaknesses in that African writers do not conceptualize independently of Western parameters. The inescapable reality is that African history and methods are referenced using the colonial archive, and this has a crucial impact. But at this point, the decoloniality that one can pose is “awareness” of such Western epistemic order (Praeg, 2017). And Ubuntu debate is not immune from such inescapable reality.

Although Ubuntu is an African concept it must find a way in every society. Philosophy such as Ubuntu that deals with people and lived experiences need not to have a fixed framework but an idea and general guideline as a broader overall framework. This is not to reduce Ubuntu into everything that is good and nice. Praeg (2017) acknowledges that the framework of Ubuntu in itself can evoke violence and discrimination. For instance, the author argues that, when Ubuntu is framed as a communitarian, it can assume violence. The argument is that, as it has been witnessed during the African struggles and political parties, “common good can only be prioritized over individual rights through the violence of coercion” (Praeg 2017:295) in the name of unity. Praeg make example with the African National Congress (ANC) as a South African leading party. He argues that ANC violate even the constitution in the name of sustaining unity in the party (Praeg, 2017). This causes confusion between Ubuntu and violence. Thus, when one chooses Ubuntu domain, the unintended dimensions should be acknowledged and minimized. Adoption of a humanism perspective is encouraged for the redistribution of justice. This will allow Ubuntu’s universality, yet context-specific application.

Relevance of Ubuntu in the context of social work education in South Africa

Social work education, in South Africa, is not alien from the context of challenges that affect the country and the continent as a whole (Mzinyane & Motloug 2022). This means that social work students and educators are, alike, affected by the contextual issues of the wider South African society. Some of the macro-structural issues are highlighted in the background section, earlier in this article. Whilst, some of the contextual issues include the complexities such as inequality (cf. Mzinyane & Motloug 2022), poverty, massification in higher education (cf. Simpson, 2015), and the disfavour of indigenous languages, among other issues, as mentioned by Makhanya and Zibane (2020). As a result, these contextual necessitate the intentional use of Ubuntu, by students and educators, as a practical remedy to the aforementioned challenges that affect social work education in a South African context.

Starting with inequality, Mzinyane and Motloug (2022) mapped out the series of features of inequality that are noticeable in social work students within a South African university. One of these features includes the reality of the urban-rural divide among social work students in South African universities. It is an axiomatic reality that South Africa is the most unequal society and this is also a feature in the classroom environment during social work teaching and learning. Mthethwa (2018) cited by Makhanya (2020: 109), stated that “poor [social work] students coming from rural areas remain unprepared for [...] technological pressures” within institutions of higher education. On the same note, Msiza et al. (2020) as cited in Mzinyane and Motloug (2022) argue that some students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would normally use a computer in higher education for

the first time. This indicates that the battleground for social work students within a single lecture room remains unequal in South African institutions. As a result, this then necessitates the need for African students to assist each other in curbing their unequal lack in relation to technology and other instruments of social work education. Given the reality that some students would be given group activities amongst other expectations of social work education, then it becomes relevant for them to acknowledge the fact that 'they are because of their peers'. Their success is sometimes dependent on their peers. Social work educators need to be cognizant of social work students' contextual realities and adapt their requirements accordingly. According to Nzimakwe (2014) cited in Makhanya (2022) Ubuntu lies on the premise that 'your pain is my pain, my wealth is your wealth, and your salvation is my salvation'. This then becomes an important consideration for social work educators and students alike.

On the issue of poverty, Mzinyane and Motloung (2022: 259) indicated that "a common problem that we also observed from our students was unstable and unpredictable electricity and network coverage". They further revealed in their study that "there were students that described living in conditions that were overcrowded and this was observed when some students would turn on their cameras during virtual class sessions" (*ibid*). This, then, indicates that social work education in South Africa comprises students who are affected by competing socio-educational demands that require consideration from their peers and educators. Therefore, the use of Ubuntu becomes crucial in instances of lack, poverty, and trouble.

Massification and large classes in social work education are also huge factors that are worth noting in South African social work education (Simpson, 2015). Simpson describes large classes and massification as a threat to the professional socialization of social work students (*ibid*). She further mentions that there is a shortage of resources for both educators and students which further compounds the issue of large social work classes. As a solution, she suggested the use of technological tools such as learning management systems (i.e. Moodle or eLearning sites) where students would post their questions to the community of other students, who are likely to respond to the concerns of their peers whilst social work educators are monitoring such discussions. This signifies the importance of acknowledging the power of communalism, and oneness that can be brought by technology into social work education.

On the disfavour of African languages in social work education, Makhanya and Zibane (2020) argued that "a university lecture hall is one of the university spaces that is assumed to promote critical engagements and to nurture the growth and development of social work students". Therefore, if African languages are disfavoured or underutilized in favour of English, then that becomes a barrier. As a result, integrating Ubuntu philosophy into the lecture hall operations of social work education is crucial. According to Makhanya (2022: 141) "Ubuntu is the basis for fairness consideration in the development of social work practice". This means that the consideration of diverse languages, but especially dominant African languages in lecture rooms, must be crucial in advancing an emancipatory and Afrocentric education for social work in higher education spaces.

On a final note, Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) explained the code of ethics of social work as enriched in the Ubuntu philosophy. Social work focuses on 'human solidarity, empathy and human dignity' (Mugumbate & Nyanguru 2013:91). Thus, Ubuntu speaks to social work in the form of calls for democracy, equity and collaboration as also suggested by the South African White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997 (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Incorporating Ubuntu into social work academia can help students better understand and appreciate the importance of culture, community, and relationships in promoting social justice and well-being. It can also help students develop practical skills and approaches that are aligned with social work's core values and ethical principles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are strong links between Ubuntu philosophy and social work education. Both Ubuntu and social work education emphasize the importance of relationships, community, and collective well-being. Incorporating Ubuntu into social work education can help students and teachers to better understand and appreciate the importance of culture, community, and relationships in promoting social justice. It can also help to develop practical skills and approaches that are aligned with social work core values and ethical principles. Ubuntu within social work can help students and teachers to understand and appreciate the importance of cultural competence, context-based approaches, community engagement, and ethical and values-based practice. In South Africa, the Ubuntu philosophy has been recognized as a guiding principle for the country's transition to democracy and the promotion of social justice. Social work education has similarly emphasized the importance of addressing social inequality, promoting social justice, and empowering marginalized communities. Overall, the links between Ubuntu and social work education in South Africa highlight the importance of cultural context and the relevance of indigenous knowledge in informing social work practice and education. By incorporating Ubuntu into social work education, South African social work students can develop a deeper understanding of their clients and communities and be better equipped to promote social justice and well-being.

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