

# Afrocentric Pedagogy as Transformative Praxis in Social Work Education

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## Abstract

**Problem:** Social work education is still stuck in epistemologies of Eurocentrism that continues to perpetrate epistemic violence on the African systems of knowledge, where the Black students are sidelined and the practitioners are unprepared to serve the Black communities. However, the translation of Afrocentric theory into pedagogical practice is under researched, even though in recent years, there is increasingly more awareness about this crisis.

**Method:** The qualitative thematic synthesis of the interdisciplinary literature was the method of this study that involved Afrocentric theory, critical pedagogy, decolonial theory, and social work education. Based on the six-step model provided by Braun and Clarke, the analysis systematically found the patterns in both canonical and contemporary literature to create an overall conceptual framework.

**Findings:** The analysis showed that there were nine interconnected themes that were grouped into four areas, including epistemological (epistemic justice and centering African knowledge systems; validation of multiple ways of knowing; historical reclamation and counter-narrative) and curricular (representation of Black contributors; integration of African philosophical frameworks; diversified assessment modalities) domains and relational (collective learning communities and Ubuntu relationality; recognition of racialized identities and belonging) and institutional (institutional resistance and the labor of transformation) ones.

**Contribution:** In this paper, Afrocentric pedagogy is developed as transformative praxis, the dialectical unity of reflection and action to humanization and liberation, instead of simply adding content to it. It offers educators, administrators, and advocates with a consistent argument to support epistemological, curricular, relational, and institutional aspects of change in social work education at the same time.

**Keywords:** Afrocentric pedagogy, Social Work, Education

## 1. Introduction

The field of social work is at the crossroads. The profession itself, as a global entity, is struggling to reconcile a paradoxical situation in which its professed principles of social justice, human rights and the dignity and worth of all human beings are in conflict with its historical involvement in colonial enterprises, white supremacist ideologies, and epistemological violence against non-Western knowledge systems. No one has been more clearly experienced than in the education of social workers who will represent Black communities, communities whose experiences, histories, and cultural resources have been systematically marginalized in the very curricula created to help practitioners become competent and ethically practiced.

The issue is not the issue of omission but the issue of orientation. Contrary to what Ouedraogo and colleagues (2025) suggest, the Eurocentrism of leading epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies in the educational and social work field is very evident and it is steady in its failure to explain the realities of Black people (Ouedraogo et al., 2025). Such a failure does not go unnoticed; it has material effects. These gaps have been reported to cause negligence, discriminatory practice, and unbeneficial results among Black service users (Garner, 2025). According to Carranza (2022), the social work classroom was designed and occupied by White bodies; it remains a spatial projection of the overall White orientation of the profession (Carranza, 2022, p. 166). In this White-oriented environment, the Black students are exposed to the curriculum that is mostly European and European American based, which instills in them a need to hear and read the materials and discussions that featured people who resembled them or had comparable experiences as they do (Best-Giacomini, 2024, p. 78).

This epistemic exclusion is what Spivak (1988) calls epistemic violence, which is the systematic silence of the marginalized peoples through the destruction of their systems of knowledge, beliefs, traditions and language (Spivak, 1988, cited in Gant et al., 2026). It becomes compounded by the fact that Black students and educators become a source of knowledge generation and exploration to their White counterparts instead of the objects of their knowledge traditions (Carranza, 2021, p. 145). The classroom is made a non-belonging space where the grid of colonialism identifies every individual as being a part of it, outside it, or as a guest (Carranza, 2021, p. 166).

It is in this context that Afrocentric pedagogy comes out as both the criticism and positive alternative. Afrocentricity is a theoretical position disseminated by Asante (1980, 1990, 1998, 2003, 2007) that focuses the African agency, experiences, and perspectives as the point of departure in the analysis of the social phenomena. Asante (1991-1992) advocates an Afrocentric curriculum that places African people as the subject of history instead of objects by breaking the rhetoric that has placed the European experience as the universal and African experience as the specific, deviant, or nonexistent.

The Afrocentric paradigm has been elaborated by other scholars working in the field of social work, such as Schiele (1996, 2017), who explains the philosophical basis and implications of the paradigm in practice. Schiele (1996) bases Afrocentric social work on values comprising of spirituality, collective identity as well as affective knowledge- values that are a stark contrast to Eurocentric paradigms of individualism, materialism, and rationalism. Greater freshness, Garner (2025) has reported the perception of Afrocentric theory, by Black social workers, as necessary to counter the ethnocentricity of social work training and to develop culturally meaningful and culturally effective practice (Garner, 2025).

Nonetheless, the Afrocentric theory translation into the pedagogic practice is still underexplored. Although scholars have defined the philosophical basis of the Afrocentricity and what it entails in practice, there has been less focal attention to how the Afrocentric principles can and should guide the teaching and learning processes that the social workers go through to become them. The given paper will fill that gap, considering Afrocentric pedagogy as a transformative praxis the combination of reflection and action aimed at structures of oppression and humanization, liberation.

Here the notion of praxis which is based on the tradition of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2000) is critical. Afrocentric pedagogy does not only entail the incorporation of African content into the existing curricular constructions, it represents an elementary shift of the very process of education. It demands what hooks (1994) refers to as education as the practice of freedom - a pedagogical practice that opposes domination at every tier, and establishes the environment where both educators and students can be completely human beings (hooks, 1994).

The research questions to be resolved in this paper are the following: (1) What are the theoretical basis of Afrocentric pedagogy in social work education? (2) What is the Afrocentric pedagogy transformative practice in the areas of epistemological, curriculum, relational, and institutional spheres? (3) Which nine themes arise in thematic analysis of the literature available on Afrocentric pedagogy? (4) What are the tensions and possibilities of the implementation of Afrocentric pedagogy in the contemporary setting of social work education? (5) Which are the directions of future research and practice suggested by the existing scholarship?

The importance of this question does not just stop with academic interest. With the end of the United Nations International Decade of People of African Descent (2015-2024) and a second decade expected, the Afrocentric education has been promoted in an institutional way. Ouedraogo and colleagues (2025) observe that the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent has clearly stated the need of Afrocentric education in Canada in the recommendation 94(e) (Ouedraogo et al., 2025, p. 12). Of the same caliber, other nations of the world are initiating efforts of this kind, as the struggles to decolonize South Africa, or the continued confrontation with anti-Black racism in American education. Social work education as a place of professionalization has the opportunity and the task to act.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The research used a qualitative thematic synthesis of the literature on Afrocentric pedagogy in social work education. In particular, thematic synthesis, whose formulation is introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), suits thematic research that tends to synthesize and make sense of theoretical constructs between and among the interdisciplinary research with the aim of creating new conceptual knowledge. This will be done by using a systematic method to identify, analyze and report the patterns in the already existing literature and still stay within the interpretive and critical paradigms that resonate with Afrocentric epistemological dedications.

The study design was carried out in four stages which were interrelated. Foundational stage entailed extensive activity in reading the theoretical traditions of Afrocentric pedagogy: Afrocentricity as expressed by Asante (1980, 1990, 1998, 2003, 2007) and theorized about social work by Schiele (1996, 2017); critical pedagogy as theorized by Freire (1970/2000) and hooks (1994); and decolonial theory applied to social work education by Dei (2002). This theoretical basis was important in keeping the later analysis sensitive to the philosophical promises and political interests of Afrocentric approaches.

The thematic analysis stage was based on the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006): to familiarize with the data, we had to read the entire set of resources; the initial coding was done to salient statements and concepts within the context of Afrocentric pedagogy; the search of themes was achieved through the clustering of our initial codes, into possible thematic patterns; a review of themes to guarantee item selectivity and representativeness relative to coded passages and the entire set of data; definition and naming of themes were done using accurate description language; and finally, the methodical procedure created nine different themes that describe Afrocentric pedagogy as transformative praxis.

Synthesis phase identified the nine themes in an integrative system with four domains of epistemological, curricular, relational and institutional domains to bring light to the interrelationship of the themes and their overall contribution to the transformative practice. Lastly, the implications stage produced the research, practice, and institutional change recommendations based on the synthesized framework by considering the feasibility of implementing them and challenges.

## **2.2 Materials and Sources**

The main sources that were used to make this synthesis included the scholarship in the reference list, which is an embodiment of the classical and modern input in the Afrocentric theory, social work education, critical pedagogy, and decolonial thinking. Literature was divided into canonical literature on Afrocentricity (Asante, 1980, 1990, 1998, 2003, 2007; Asante and Mazama, 2010), literature on social work applications (Schiele, 1996, 2017; Belgrave and Allison, 2006), literature on critical educational scholarship (Anyon, 1980; Banks, 1991, 1997, 2010). The timeframe of early publications of the 1970s and 1980s up to 2025 and 2026 allowed tracking down the development of ideas and their use in the present day.

The interdisciplinary quality of the sources also demonstrates the very nature of the Afrocentric pedagogy which relies on Africana studies, education, social work, psychology, and critical theory. This breadth made sure that analysis can give attention to several facets of pedagogical practice- epistemological foundations, to curricular content, to classroom relationships and to institutional contexts, and have a sense of coherence by taking an interest in their implications to social work education in particular.

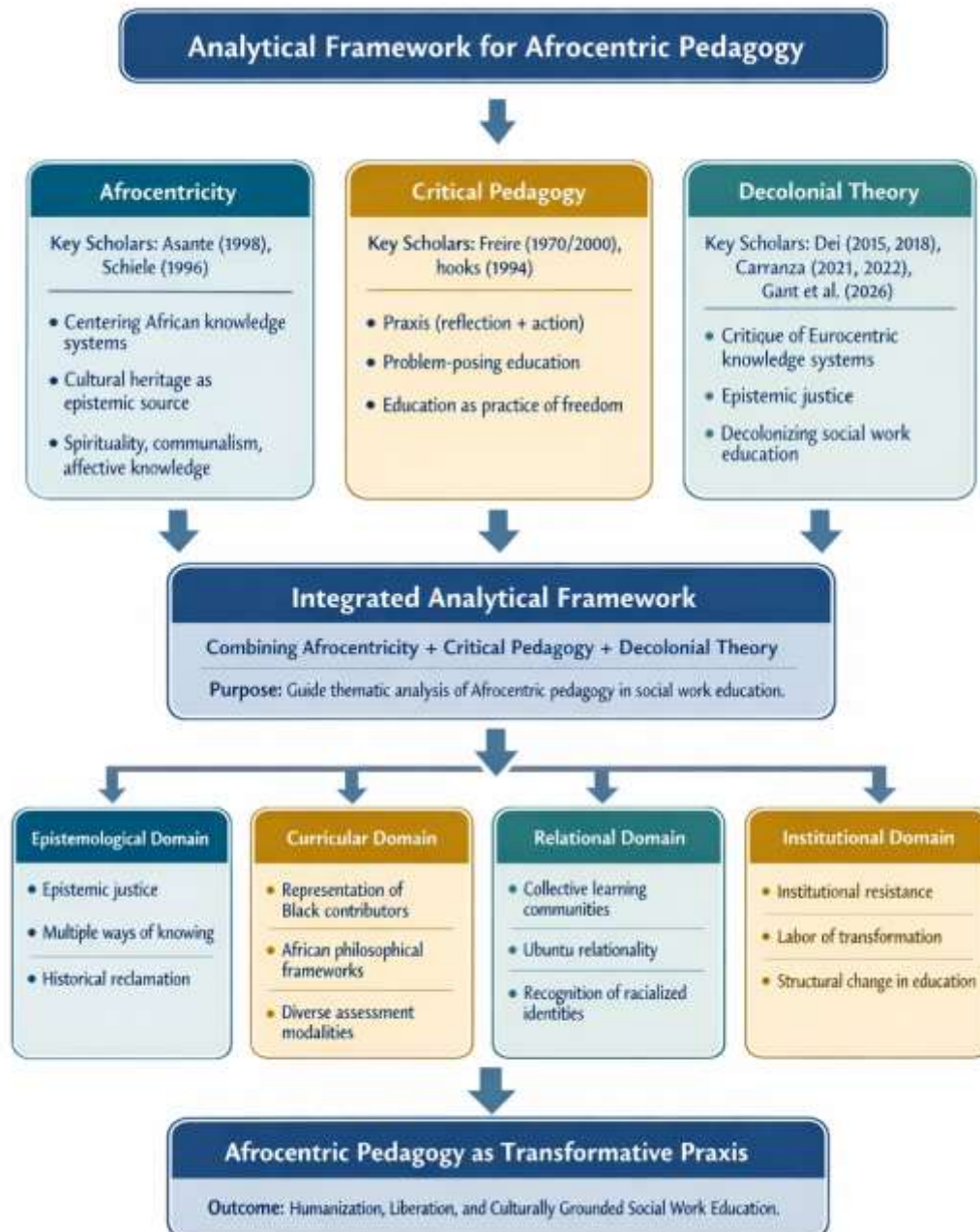
## **2.3 Analytical Framework**

The theoretical perspectives have also been integrated into a framework that directed the analysis. The substantive content and value orientation was given by Afrocentricity (Asante, 1998; Schiele, 1996), which recognized the African cultural heritage and cosmology, ways of knowing as a valid and necessary source of knowledge production and professional practice. According to the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) article on African-Centered Social Work, this model demands that the African cultural heritage is presented as a source of divine power, tactic, and spiritual journey in bargaining about life.

Critical pedagogy added the idea of praxis the dialectic between reflection and action which is aimed at changing oppressive structures to lead to humanization. The critique of banking education and explanation of problem-posing pedagogy given by Freire (1970/2000) helped comprehend how Afrocentric approaches may improve classroom relationships and knowledge production processes, whereas the extension of the understanding of the complexities of transformative education offered by hooks (1994) helped to understand various intersections of race, gender, and class.

Carraso (2021, 2022), Dei (2015, 2018) applied decolonial theory to the social work education field, foresaw the structural aspects of epistemic violence and demands of actual decolonization. Recent attempts of decolonizing global social work education by Gant and others (2026) showed how these frameworks may be operationalized on course and program levels in terms of how models of linking theoretical commitments with pedagogical practice can be developed.

This paper uses a combined analytical paradigm which is based on Afrocentricity, Critical Pedagogy, and Decolonial Theory. All of these theoretical traditions play a role in understanding the interpretation of Afrocentric pedagogy in social work education. It is described in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1. Analytical Framework – Afrocentric Pedagogy as Transformative Praxis**

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

The present work is informed by an ethical obligation to epistemic justice which is the acknowledgment that everyone has a right to his or her knowledge systems as well as to be able to contribute equally to the production of knowledge. Its approach that puts the voices and schemes of Afrocentric scholars in the center is in line with this promise as it prohibits the reproduction of colonial structures of knowledge. According to Dei (2018), the assertion of Black subjectivity and Indigeneity cannot be done without a conscious methodological decision that will not reproduce colonial knowledge hierarchies. It is based on this synthesis that Afrocentric scholarship is viewed not merely as information to be replicated and re-read within the parameters of Eurocentrism but as speculative resources whose internal logic and pragmatic wisdom are to be followed and enhanced.



### 3. Findings and Results

Thematic analysis revealed nine themes to define the Afrocentric pedagogy as transformative praxis in social work education. These themes are categorized into four interrelated areas, including epistemological, curricular, relational and institutional, which involve certain practices, issues and the possibilities of transformation.

#### **Domain 1: Epistemological Themes**

##### ***Theme 1: Epistemic Justice and the Centering of African Knowledge Systems***

The literature has been consistent in granting that Afrocentric pedagogy must shift its paradigm as expressed by Asante (1998) as the Eurocentric hegemony to the Afrocentric paradigm in social work as outlined by Schiele (1996). This change is not cumulative but constitutive: it changes the platforms on which knowledge is justified, structured and propagated in professional education.

Garner (2025) recorded the views of black social workers that the Eurocentric manner of thinking still prevails across social work programs and professional standards (p. 45). Researchers in his study said that these Eurocentric models do not accord any attention to culturally agreeable methodologies that are habitual and meaningful to Black social workers (Garner, 2025, p. 47). The product is a professional formation experience whereby the Black students have to traverse between the knowledge traditions of their communities and professional knowledge which is endorsed.

The Afrocentric paradigm is an alternative that is based on other philosophical premises. According to Schiele (1996), three postulations have been established as their foundations, which consist of spirituality of reality, unity of human beings, and value of affective knowledge. These are the opposite of Eurocentric materialism, individualism and rationalism emphases. By direct focus on African knowledge systems, it is a direct counter to what Gant and colleagues (2026) define as epistemic violence to the systematic silencing of marginalized peoples as a result of destroying their knowledge systems, beliefs, traditions and language (p. 5).

##### ***Theme 2: Validation of Multiple Ways of Knowing***

Afrocentric pedagogy authenticates the various ways of knowing outside the confined pose of positivist epistemology. As said in the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) article about African-Centered Social Work, African-centered scholars have a fundamental understanding of a collective work that concentrates on various methods of knowing and, therefore, is antagonistic to the dichotomous positivist colonial production of knowledge. This legitimacy is projected on the type of knowledge that is often marginalized in institutions of learning: oral traditions, spiritual knowledge, embodied knowledge, and community-based wisdom.

Abrahams and Troike (1972) independently laid the initial groundwork of acknowledging the fact that language and styles of communication represent profound cultural knowledge systems. Boykin (1994) expounded on how Afro-cultural manifestations such as movement preferences, music tastes, and verve can be used as the educational instrument instead of being pathologized in schools.

This theme can be implemented in pedagogy by what Price (2021) refers to as flexibility in assignment modalities, where students have a choice to make when presenting written, oral, and artistic presentations (p. 9). This flexibility is in recognition that knowledge can be represented in other ways besides that of the traditional academic paper in recognition that communication modalities are already part of the African and African diasporic cultural heritage.

##### ***Theme 3: Historical Reclamation and Counter-Narrative***

Afrocentric pedagogy gets involved in the recovery and reinterpretation of historical records that have be

en distorted or eliminated by the Eurocentric scholarship. The history of Black education in the South by Anderson (1988) both recorded the systematic oppression and at the same time, it could also show the African American agency and strength. The analysis presented by Brown (2008) of the Atlantic slavery retrieved the experiences and views hitherto kept in the periphery. The works by Bethune (2008) give the first-hand experience of the wisdom of a Black educator who pioneered.

This historical text confronts directly the discourses of deficit that place issues in the black communities instead of the systems of oppression. As suggested by Schiele (2017), the Afrocentric paradigm is one of the results of pathologizing narratives in social work. According to the entry of the Oxford Bibliographies (2024), the concept of African-centered social work is based on the assumption that the history of oppression of people of African descent has been overlooked, and the pathos of the history has been adopted as the source of explanation of human behavior and environment. The Afrocentric pedagogy is a response to this orientation, based on the African culture as a source of power and orientation.

## **Domain 2: Curricular Themes**

### ***Theme 4: Curricular Representation of Black Contributors***

One of the recurrent themes is the intentional focus on Black scholars, practitioners, and leaders in the community as the creators of knowledge in the curriculum. Price (2021) explained that the course includes the input of the past and present of the African Americans per week (p. 8). This activity is a response to the erasure that Best-Giacomini (2024) identified: as a Black student, she had to deal with course materials which were mostly centered around Europeans and European Americans (p. 78).

Banks (1973, 1991, 1997, 2008) has been a longtime supporter of multicultural curriculum change using ethnic studies and diversity of views. His studies on multicultural education and citizenship (Banks, 1997) and on diversity, group identity, and citizenship (Banks, 2008) give theoretical basis to the importance of representation: it influences the way students think of themselves and their groups, as well as about their civic roles.

Regular incorporation of Black academics and practitioners is an indication that Black people are not objects but rather objects of knowledge. This is in line with what Asante (1991-1992) refers to as an Afrocentric curriculum; the curriculum that places African people as subjects and not as objects of history.

### ***Theme 5: Integration of African Philosophical Frameworks***

The article by Makhanya and Mzinyane (2023) discussed Ubuntu as a social work teaching and learning framework. Ubuntu, where the academic experience of a student is considered in the critical, interactive, and socially engaged paradigm, is congruent with the values of the rest of the African society, as well as aims to focus on collectiveness, togetherness, and justice to all (Makhanya and Mzinyane, 2023, p. 115). Such integration of philosophical systems will equip students with conceptual resources that are based on the African cultural traditions as opposed to the imported ones of European origins.

Belgrave and Allison (2006) followed the lines of African philosophical underpinning and modern psychological practice and found out ways African philosophical assumptions, including spirituality, communalism and harmony with nature, reflected in cultural patterns of the African American and had implications in helping professions. Bowser, Jones and Auletta Young (1995) placed this in the context of the larger project of the multicultural university under the contention that true transformation demands institutional-level synthesis of various philosophical traditions.

### ***Theme 6: Diversified Assessment Modalities***

Afrocentric pedagogy is changing not only the subject matter that is taught but also the learning process

is exemplified. Price (2021) explained that it is possible to give students different options in which they can complete the assignment in written, oral, and art forms. A podcast was developed by one of the students exploring the ways Black Millennials deal with racial stress by using substances and sobriety paths (Price, 2021, p. 9).

This diversification is in line with the fact that Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) have realized that knowledge is multi-dimensional and multi-cognitive. Diversifying assessment modalities, Afrocentric pedagogy validates the various forms of learning and allows students to show their knowledge in the forms that are also congruent with their cultural background and strength. Au (2006) proved that the culturally responsive assessment practices are better able to portray the strengths of diverse learners, and Ball (2000) focused on the assessment practices that are able to identify and develop the cultural assets.

### **Domain 3: Relational Themes**

#### ***Theme 7: Collective Learning Communities and Ubuntu Relationality***

The seventh theme has to do with the structure and life of teaching / learning relationships. Ubuntu also means that the life of people cannot exist without the surrounding, which is why according to Makhanya and Mzinyane (2023), social work students also form a significant component of other people. This philosophical dedication is transferred to classroom practices that are based on interdependence, as opposed to competitive individualism. Students will learn together, learn together, help each other develop and learn to see their learning as a part of common wellbeing.

One of the dimensions of Afrocultural expression that Boykin (1994) endorsed had direct implications in regards to schooling, which is communalism. In contrast to the Eurocentric education that focused the program on personal success and competition, the Afrocentric strategies are centered at individual success and collective accountability. This is reflected in the pedagogical form of learning structures, peer mentoring and the overall investment in classroom climate.

Price (2021) has explained that she has included in her pattern of syllabus anticipations about students towards each other (Price, 2021, p. 8) an open behavior of spreading the obligation to learn and community wellbeing. This is different with traditional classrooms where the instructor is the only one with authority and responsibility of classroom dynamics.

#### ***Theme 8: Acknowledgment of Racialized Identities and Belonging***

By seeing and not eliminating the racialized identities, Afrocentric pedagogy establishes a setting of belonging. According to Price (2021), her course does not annul racial identities of social work students but acknowledges them (p. 7). This identification is significant as, according to Carranza, the conventional social work classroom places the idealized White subject in the center, where the subject is presumed to be learning about the racialized Other (p. 168). Afrocentric pedagogy interrupts this orientation by helping Black students to be themselves as opposed to being represented or studied as objects.

The effects of Afrocentric education on the development of identity were listed by Ouedraogo and colleagues (2025): in the case of Black students studying at mostly White schools, Afrocentric-based courses offer infrequent instances of intellectual and emotional integration. According to one student enrolled in Price (2021) course, U-M is a white school. Professor Price centered her attention on the lives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color that is very rare, and the first occasion where we most of us have experienced that thing (p. 11).

Abu El-Haj (2006) discussed the way in which the daily activities of education might reinforce or disturb the tendencies of exclusion. With the conditions of authentic belonging provided by Afrocentric pedagogy,



there is the contribution to what Abu El-Haj calls elusive justice: the perpetual effort of making educational spaces truly inclusive. This entry of the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) also links this to the pursuit of the wholeness, healing, and restorative justice outlined by African-centered social work as a liberator practice to dignify Black humanity. This curative orientation acknowledges that learning takes place within the context of constant trauma, i.e. historical oppression, present-day racism and daily microaggressions, and that pedagogy must thus establish conditions of healing in addition to intellectual growth.

#### **Domain 4: Institutional Themes**

##### ***Theme 9: Institutional Resistance and the Labor of Transformation***

The ninth theme touches upon the institutional settings of the Afrocentric pedagogy practice and the work that the agents of transformative work must do. Gant and colleagues (2026) explicitly focused on the conflicts that might arise because of the involvement and teaching about global social work in colleges and universities that are situated in the Global North (p. 24). Their discussion recognizes the fact that institution-wide resistance to decolonizing education is based on institutional investments in Eurocentric models.

The reflection of Carranza (2021) on a life as a racialized social work educator in Canada helps to realize that the faculty teaching as a person of color has to work extra hard: being an outsider by definition and, at the same time, being expected to instruct White students as well as students of color, she faces the complicated task (p. 148). This is implicitly recognized in the entry on the Oxford Bibliographies (2024), which makes reference to the national associations of Black social workers, i.e., the National Association of Black Social Workers, as the so-called cultural vanguard organizations that promoted African-centered practice.

The focus on the idea of structural racism within the social work setting and its implications on prejudice, discrimination, and dual functionalities of Black workers (p. 51) makes the analysis outside the classroom. Black social workers teachers have to work in environments that are also oppressive to them in terms of race. Their efforts in spearheading transformative pedagogical practice in hostile conditions are usually unacknowledged and un-supported.

Ouedraogo and others (2025) placed their research in the framework of the United Nations International Decades of People of African Descent, when the recommendation 94(e) is very specific and demands Afrocentric education (p. 12). Such a global system offers an edge to activists who want to get institutional capital in Afrocentric strategies. The focus of their work is on the idea that the institutional commitment to the Afrocentric knowledge, community-based projects, and the systematic change is required (Ouedraogo et al., 2025, p. 20).

The paragraph in the entry of the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) also stresses the fact that African-centered social work is highly communal and involves Africanist sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists and historians, cultural artists, and the mother wit of the community stakeholders. This interdisciplinary, community-based nature implies that Afrocentric pedagogy does not just need alliances within the social work programs and universities but also to go beyond the institutional walls.

The examples of programmatic infrastructure that facilitates justice-based education were given by Gant and colleagues (2026) e.g., Global Social Work Practice Pathway at the University of Michigan (p. 18). These structures, whether in courses, tracks or certificate programs can provide long-term space on which Afrocentric approaches can be practiced instead of isolating them to solitude courses.

Historical scholarship puts into a context modern institutional problems. Brophy (1983) recorded the influences of institutional backgrounds on the expectation of the educators and the performance of the students. According to Anderson, Medrich, and Fowler (2007), hyper-simplified models of educational inequality were critiqued as multi-dimensional. These texts shed light on the institutional nature of institutional barriers and the systematic response of institutional change.

Table 1 presents the full summary of the nine themes in domains, their descriptions, the main contributors of these themes in the scholarly world, and their implications to pedagogical practice.

**Table 1: Domains, Focus, Themes, and Its Transformative Purposes**

| Domain                 | Focus                                    | Themes     | Transformative Purpose                                                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Epistemological</b> | Foundations of knowledge                 | Themes 1-3 | Reconfigures what counts as knowledge, who can know, and how knowledge is validated |
| <b>Curricular</b>      | Content and structure of learning        | Themes 4-6 | Transforms what is taught, whose work is centered, and how learning is demonstrated |
| <b>Relational</b>      | Classroom dynamics and human connections | Themes 7-8 | Reshapes how students and educators relate to self, other, and community            |
| <b>Institutional</b>   | Structural contexts and systemic change  | Theme 9    | Addresses the conditions necessary to sustain transformative practice               |

## 4. Discussion

As the presented thematic analysis has shown, Afrocentric pedagogy in social work education is not a single method or content addition but a multidimensional transformative praxis that relates nine concepts related to four spheres. Such implications, tensions, and complexities are analyzed in this discussion and how the nine themes are collectively responding to the underlying challenges in social work education.

### 4.1 The Interrelationship of Themes

The nine themes are analytically different, but practically, they are closely intertwined. Black contributions (Theme 4) and incorporation of African philosophical systems (Theme 5) in the curriculum rely on and articulate epistemic justice (Theme 1). Theme 2 makes possible diversified assessment modalities (Theme 6). Historical reclamation (Theme 3) is a counter-narrative that confronts the deficit discourses and establishes the grounds of belonging (Theme 8). The recognition of racialized identities is a necessary and sustained experience in collective learning communities (Theme 7). Any pedagogical practice is constituted by and needs to maneuver institutional resistance (Theme 9).

The implication of such interrelationship is that transformative Afrocentric pedagogy is not something that can be applied in bits. An intervention that adds Black contributors (Theme 4) without considering epistemic justice (Theme 1) can still be confined in the Eurocentric paradigms in which the Black

knowledge is secondary. The collective learning communities (Theme 7) formed by a program that does not address the issue of institutional resistance (Theme 9) can be sabotaged by the structural barriers. Real change involves paying attention to all four areas and practices that each theme entails at the same time.

#### **4.2 Afrocentric Pedagogy as Response to Epistemic Violence**

The nine themes can be interpreted to mean an all-encompassing answer to the epistemic violence that has marginalized African and African-descended individuals in social work education. Basing the discussion on Spivak (1988), Gant and others (2026) state that the prolonged dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies, axiology, and relation modes in the classroom reproduces what they identify as epistemic violence or silencing the oppressed people by destroying systems of knowledge, beliefs, traditions, and language (p. 5).

All the themes cover an aspect of this violence. The reversal of the work of epistemic violence is the very notion of centering African knowledge systems (Theme 1). Eurocentric asketh is challenged in multiple ways of knowing (Theme 2) being validated. Healing history (Theme 3) is a recovery of that which was destroyed by violence. Black people are being portrayed as knowledge producers as opposed to knowledge objects because they represent Black contributors (Theme 4) and also incorporate African philosophical frameworks (Theme 5). Transforming the ways of demonstrating and sharing knowledge is through diversifying assessment (Theme 6) and the construction of the collective learning communities (Theme 7). The recognition of racialized identities and a sense of belonging (Theme 8) rejects the violence erasure requirements and heals wholeness. Addressing institutional resistance (Theme 9) acknowledges the fact that this work is being undertaken within a set of structures meant to maintain the very violence that the work is meant to address.

Nonetheless, this is not a reactive response. As Asante (2003) and Schiele (2017) point out, Afrocentricity does not provide criticism, but constructive alternatives. It offers positive resources, including philosophical, cultural, historical, practice strategy, which prepare students to practice with a cultural foundation. The participants of Garner (2025) appreciated the Afrocentric theory not as one which critiqued the Eurocentrism but as one which provided culturally relevant, familiar, and significant ways to Black social workers (p. 47).

#### **4.3 The Dialectic of Inclusion and Transformation**

One of the key contradictions to be drawn on the basis of this analysis is the connection between inclusion and transformation. The strategies of inclusion respond to the marginalization of Black views by engaging in the course content with information about the Black communities, Black scholars, or strategies of Black practice. This is a valuable work; students require the correct knowledge of communities they will work in and being exposed to various academic traditions.

But Afrocentric scholars need more radical change. Not only does Asante (1991-1992) suggest including the African voice, but also making its perspectives central. The way Schiele (1996) defines the Afrocentric paradigm, it is not a set of practice techniques but an alternative vision of the world. The Oxford Bibliographies (2024) entry underlines that African-centered social work has its cultural integrity and origin in social justice movements of the 1960s, which indicate its nature of political and epistemological project, rather than the curricular change.

This difference is of practical use. The inclusion strategies are less likely to face institutional opposition as they do not involve any restructuring; an Afrocentric practice unit can be introduced into an existing course of Human Behavior without changing its basic orientation. Transformation methods, in their turn,

confront underlying paradigms the canon, the person who teaches, how knowledge is exhibited, what passes as scholarship.

The course discussed by Price (2021) is the example of transformative practice. It does not merely impose Afrocentric content into a Eurocentric paradigm but transforms the whole learning process into a paradigm of Afrocentric values: the way the classroom is set up, the modalities of assignments, the expectations of relationships, the sources of knowledge. This transformation is more challenging to attain and maintain as compared to inclusion especially to contingent and junior faculty.

#### **4.4 The Question of Audience: For Whom Is Afrocentric Pedagogy?**

There is tension over audience as shown in the literature. Is Afrocentric pedagogy exclusive to black students? For all students? Various researchers focus on various opportunities.

In studies, Garner (2025) placed emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of Black social workers with a particular interest in the Afrocentric theory and how it applies to Black practitioners in an Eurocentric professional setting. The article in the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) about African-centered social work presents it as a response of the Black communities to oppression and as an example of how to serve Black communities. These framings indicate that they have specific implications to Black students who are about to work in black communities.

Other scholars focus on greater relevance. Gant and colleagues (2026) place decolonizing global social work education as significant to all students, by stating that; the process of decolonizing global social work education, or assisting to challenge, critique and ultimately subvert Eurocentric-based pedagogies can be utilized to bring the entire field to a mission that is more liberatory and justice-oriented (p. 4). Likewise, Makhanya and Mzinyane (2023) introduce Ubuntu as an approach to the entire social work education and not only to the African students (p. 118).

The tension is revealed through the responses of students in a course offered by Price (2021). A non-social work student has indicated that the course has not only given me a deep appreciation of the Afrocentric approaches, but it has also made me understand how inadequate Eurocentric approaches may be (p. 11) - implying that the exposure to the Afrocentric ways of thinking presented a salient critique of mainstream ways of thinking. The other student noted that the focus on the experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color is very peculiar and the first time when a majority of us have also been subjected to it during our schooling (Price, 2021, p. 11), which implied that even students of color might not have this experience that often.

These reactions indicate that Afrocentric pedagogy is in the service of various audiences differently. To Black students, it can offer cultural background, intellectual and professional structures according to the values of the community. In the case of White students, it can open the Eurocentric prejudices and offer the learning and action resources across difference. To the profession, it can help in bringing the change towards justice that Gant and colleagues (2026) envisage.

#### **4.5 Ubuntu, Collectivity, and the Critique of Individualism**

The theme 7 (Collective Learning Communities and Ubuntu Relationality) and especially the interpretation of it by Makhanya and Mzinyane (2023) deserves particular attention due to its antithesis to individualism and the elaboration of collectivist options. Although social work rhetoric appeals to the use of person in environment, Western cultural individualism and professional constructions have significantly shaped this profession to make it stronger. In clinical practice, the change can be often individual based, whereas policy practice, despite the structural basis, can often take an individualist approach in its interpretation of rights and choices.

According to Makahaya and Mzinyane (2023), Ubuntu positions place the central place on collectiveness, togetherness, and justice to everyone and the academic experience of a student is situated in the critical, interactive and socially active paradigm, which has a connection with the wider African society (p. 115). The implications of this orientation are far-reaching insofar as social work education is concerned. It implies that learning is not the isolated process but the collective one. Success in students is dependent, that is, their learning influences and is influenced by other students. Education is beneficial to the society and not just to the individual.

The classic work of Anyon (1980) on social class and hidden curriculum proved how the schooling reproduces class relations in both explicit and hidden messages. The secret curriculum of collectivity and mutual responsibility of Afrocentric pedagogy provides an alternative to the mainstream system of the competitive individualism being replicated in mainstream education.

This collectivist orientation provides a challenge to the foundational institutions of modern higher education: grading of individuals, competition in the admissions process, classes of faculty-students and the making of students as consumers. The introduction of Afrocentric pedagogy therefore needs not only the contents of courses, but institutional reforms that generate and perpetuate individualism.

#### **4.6 The Labor of Transformation**

Theme 9 (Institutional Resistance and the Labor of Transformation) sheds light on the effort that is needed in order to maintain transformative pedagogy. The question of Carranza (2021) whether she was placed as a non-belonging presence (p. 148) is typical of the existing literature on the experiences of faculty of color in predominantly White institutions. The expectations maintaining professional status in institutes of antagonism toward people of color, reforming curricula, serving students of color, educating White students about racism, place extraordinary burdens.

The focus of the article by Garner (2025) on the structural racism in the social work workplace and its effects on prejudice, discrimination, and dual functionalities of Black workers (p. The analysis is expanded by 51). The black social workers teachers have to deal with the racialized oppression in their workplaces. Managing to work in the most innovative pedagogical projects in unfriendly conditions, their efforts are usually unappreciated and unaccompanied.

Brown v. The legal segregation came to its end in 1954 through the Board of Education, but as Anderson (1988) reported, the quest of educational equity did not stop after that. That battle is being waged now and it takes long-lasting effort to endure the resistance.

These observations imply that institutional investment in the Afrocentric pedagogy should feature material assistance to the faculty and staff that practices the latter. Uedraogo and others (2025) insist on the need of an institutional commitment to Afrocentric knowledge, community-based and systematic shift (p. 20). Such commitment involves material resources, administrative support, recognition in promotion and tenure processes and retaliation.

#### **4.7 Relationship to Broader Decolonization Movements**

Lastly, Afrocentric pedagogy needs to be placed in the global movements in order to decolonize education. Gant and colleagues (2026) specifically place their work in the framework of the decolonization theory and the Indigenous and African-focused approach (p. 3), whereby decolonization demands the revision of Eurocentric and Western-dominated social systems of work, to be able to heed other voices and visions, which include the Indigenous and other marginalized parties.

This framing links the Afrocentric pedagogy to similar initiatives based on Indigenous knowledges, Latin American decolonial theory, Asian critical theory and so on. Despite the differences in the history and the



issues of each tradition, they all have the common feature of criticizing Eurocentric hegemony and devoting themselves to the centralization of marginalized knowledge systems. The global enterprise of social work education can learn within these traditions and create pedagogies that are answerable to the diverse local conditions and are concerned with epistemic justice. Bowser, Jones and Auletta Young (1995) had the vision of the multicultural university as a place where different knowledge cultures would coexist and complement each other. Afrocentric pedagogy adds to this vision by showing how it is possible to make one marginalized form of knowledge central to the process of professional education.

## **5. Future Research Directions and Recommendations**

The thematic analysis given below shows how the Afrocentric pedagogy can be transformative and also how the development of research and practice should be carried on. This section provides the guidelines on the future research and suggests directions to educators, administrators, and advocates.

### **5.1 Future Research Directions**

#### ***Empirical Investigation of Afrocentric Pedagogy in Action.***

Although theoretical studies of Afrocentric pedagogy are highly developed, there is very little empirical research on the implementation of Afrocentric principles in social work classrooms. Qualitative research that utilizes classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and course materials analysis would help make a deep insight into particular practices that make Afrocentric values become teaching and learning. There are models of Garner (2025) focus group research and interview-based studies by Ouedraogo and others (2025). Further studies will be necessary to cover a wide range of institutional contexts, geographic locations and types of programs.

#### ***Comparative Institutional Analysis.***

Theme 9 proposes institutional context to have a significant influence on the opportunities of the Afrocentric pedagogy. Comparative research on the support or limiting level of Afrocentric practices by various types of institutions: Historical Black Colleges and Universities, predominantly White, community colleges, research universities would reveal structural elements that facilitate or inhibit change. Such research may involve investigation of institutional policies, allocation of resources and leadership commitment to Afrocentric education.

#### ***Student Achievement and Performance.***

The effects of Afrocentric pedagogy on student learning, professional development in identity, and the practice afterward need to be researched. Are Afrocentric education methods of social work education associated with various patterns of practice, various career choices, or various degrees of readiness to work with Black populations? What is the experience of Afrocentric pedagogy to students with various backgrounds? These questions would be answered through longitudinal studies in which students are followed through programs and into practice.

#### ***Evaluation and Assessment System.***

In Theme 6 (Diversified Assessment Modalities), there is a need identified to have assessment modalities that are in tandem with the Afrocentric values. The traditional form of educational evaluation based on positivist presuppositions and individualist constructs might not be sufficient in describing learning that is developed within the framework of Afrocentric pedagogy. The development of alternative forms of assessment; community-based evaluation, narrative assessment, collective portfolios should enhance the Afrocentric pedagogy as well as the discussions on evaluation in education.

***Intersectional Analyses***

There is no existence of Afrocentric pedagogy beyond the other aspects of identity and oppression. Studies that address crossings with gender (mentioned in the Oxford Bibliographies entry in reference to Africana womanism) and class and other marginalized identities would enhance the knowledge. What are the Afrocentric solutions to sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, and other forms of oppression in the Black communities and beyond?

***Cross-cultural and Comparative Views.***

Although this paper majorly relies on the North American and African learning, the Afrocentric pedagogy has different manifestations in different settings. A study of the Afrocentric orientation of Caribbean social work education in a European context, both among the populations of African diaspora and in other contexts of Africa as a nation would help shed light on both similarities and the context-related differences. Such a study could also be done on the way the Afrocentric pedagogy is cross-border and translated.

***Historic Studies of Afrocentric Education.***

The work of Anderson (1988) evidences the usefulness of historical analysis in the comprehension of the new issues of education today. More historical research about the African-centered education movements, institutions and pedagogies would serve as resources to modern practice and offer lessons on the past struggle.

***Research on Institutional Change.***

Theme 9 is focused on institutional context. The studies on effective institutional change to Afrocentric and decolonized education could help to reveal strategies, conditions, and practices that contribute to successful transformation. This research may not only involve social work programs but also institutions that have engaged in long-term investments of making African and African diasporic knowledge central.

***Community Engagement Research.***

The Oxford Bibliographies (2024) article has highlighted the communal nature of African-centered social work and the role of stakeholders in the community. Studies investigating the role of Afrocentric pedagogy in communities, the experiences of community partners with Afrocentric pedagogy and circumstances that support the true partnership would enhance the literature and practice.

**5.2 Recommendations for Practice*****For Social Work Educators***

Those teachers who want to use Afrocentric pedagogy must not start searching techniques in isolation, but start working intensively with the Afrocentric theory. The social work applications of Asante (1980, 1990, 1998, 2003, 2007) and Schiele (1996, 2017) as well as resources mentioned in the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) entry provide the required background. Teachers are urged to look through their own positionality, assumptions as well as connections with the knowledge traditions they are teaching. They ought to foster working relationships with colleagues, community members and students who can assist in their work and take it further. They ought to record and publish their pedagogical habits, and make them play a part in the development of collective knowledge. They are supposed to focus on all the nine themes revealed in this analysis, and they need to understand that they need to implement them partly, which might restrain transformational possibilities.

***For Program Administrators***

Administrators are important in facilitating Afrocentric pedagogy. Examples of support include setting up resources to develop curriculum and faculty, emphasis on Afrocentric scholarship in promotion and tenure decisions, and hiring faculty with knowledge of Afrocentric ways. The administrators are to analyze the

program structures, admissions, curriculum, assessment, etc., in the ways they can hinder Afrocentric transformation. They ought to establish connections with the community partners and international systems including the UN Decade of People of African Descent to establish external support and accountability. They ought to pay attention to Theme 9 where faculty who conduct transformative pedagogy should be supported and recognized.

In the case of Accrediting Bodies and Professional Organizations.

The priorities of the programs and the attention of the faculty members are formed by the accreditation standards. Accreditation bodies of social work education ought to review their standards of Eurocentric bias and explore the possible effects of the standards to promote or mandate consideration of the Afrocentric and other non-Western knowledge systems. The professional organizations including the one that is specific to Black social workers like the National Association of Black social workers and those existing in general social work should keep developing resources, organizing conferences, and establishing policies that can advance Afrocentric education. They are also expected to cover Theme 9, that is, they have to fight structural racism within the profession and assist Black social workers in managing hostile work environments.

***In the case of Higher Education Institutions.***

The scope of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in universities must be extended to include epistemic diversity which is the acknowledgement that different kinds of knowledge systems should find a place in the academy. The institutions ought to promote establishment of African and African diasporic studies programs, community engagement facilities and other infrastructures that can perpetuate Afrocentric pedagogy in other disciplines such as social work. They are also supposed to explore their history of colonialism and racism as some institutions have already started doing so. They ought to apply the material resources, administrative support and institutional recognition that Theme 9 unveils as the prerequisites of maintaining transformative work.

***For Community Partners***

Afrocentric pedagogy relies on communal relationships. Social work curricula, teaching courses, student mentoring, and outcomes evaluation should involve community agencies, practitioners and leaders. The project is dependent on their wisdom, which the entry of the Oxford Bibliographies (2024) refers to as mother wit. The role of community partners should be to promote their inclusion and ensure that educational institutions are responsible in creating a true partnership and not a tokenism. They are also expected to write and disseminate their personal pedagogical practice, which can be added to the growing knowledge on Afrocentric education.

***For Students***

The students play critical functions in promoting and co-construction of Afrocentric pedagogy. They are able to demand courses, readings, and assignments with Afrocentric focus. They have an opportunity to give their faculty and administrators feedback on their educational experiences. They are able to create learning communities and study groups that reflect the Ubuntu values. They will be able to record and disseminate their learning, which will become part of the community project of shifting the aim of social work education to justice.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has explored Afrocentric pedagogy as transformative praxis in social work education based on qualitative thematic synthesis of scholarship in the Afrocentric theory and critical pedagogy and decolonial

thought, social work education research. Nine themes were identified in the analysis, and they are grouped under four interconnected domains, including epistemological, curricular, relational, and institutional; each of which entails practices and orientations that result in a radical restructuring of social work education towards epistemic justice, cultural grounding, and collective liberation.

They are the Epistemic Justice and the Centering of African Knowledge Systems; Validation of Multiple Ways of Knowing; Historical Reclamation and Counter-Narrative; Curricular Representation of Black Contributors; Integration of African Philosophical Frameworks; Diversified Assessment Modalities; Collective Learning Communities and Ubuntu Relationality; Acknowledgment of Racialized Identities and Belonging; and Institutional Resistance and the Labor of Transformation. All these themes together prove Afrocentric pedagogy, is not a collection of methods to teach about the Black communities or to Black students. Instead, it is a whole-person philosophy that brings African knowledge systems into the category of valid and central to professional education; challenges deficit discourses through placing African cultural heritage in the role of resource and strength; practices relational pedagogies of collectivity and care through philosophical traditions such as Ubuntu; and maneuvers institutional obstacles and demands structural change.

These tensions and complexities of this work were uncovered in the conversation: the dialectic of inclusion versus transformation, the issue of audience and purpose, the labor requirements on Black teachers, and the relation to wider decolonial activism. The imperative to develop long-term, collaborative action in the continuing process of re-forming social work teaching and education is not intended to overshadow the significance of Afrocentric pedagogy.

With the United Nations pursuing its agenda on behalf of people of African descent, social work education struggling to come to terms with its colonial pasts, and Black communities still in need of education that empowers them, Afrocentric pedagogy is a useful tool. It offers theoretical justification on what justice-oriented education needs. It provides a practical advice in changing the classrooms and curriculums. It links local pedagogical practices to those of epistemic justice in the world.

Humanization is the ultimate goal of Afrocentric pedagogy, as well as Afrocentric project, in general. Afrocentricity is focused on reinstating agency, dignity and humanity to African descendants as Asante (2003) and Schiele (1996) note. This is what it entails in social work education to make practitioners who are capable of seeing the entire humanity of those they serve, who have cultural resources in working effectively, and who see their work as contributing larger struggles of liberation. It refers to both the establishment of learning environments where black students feel a sense of belonging and in which all students are exposed to the limitations of any given tradition of knowledge. It implies creating institutions which would respect the knowledge of diverse peoples and give them an education of justice.

The paper has also added to that project through synthesizing the available scholarship, analyzing the framework of nine themes that define the Afrocentric pedagogy, and defining future research and action directions. But it is a collective work and it is continuous. As the scholars mentioned in all of the materials used in this paper make it clear, Afrocentric pedagogy is created by communities, maintained by networks of practitioners, and working toward goals that go beyond the personal growth. Hopefully, this synthesis can validate that social work, and can help transform social work education towards justice.

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