Research on the Vatsonga people of Southern Africa: A reflection on a case study

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ABSTRACT

For decades, African researchers relied on Eurocentric concepts, models, philosophies, ethics, designs, and methods ingrained in the European research literature. The indiscriminate use of Eurocentric concepts to conceive African research is not sustainable given the uniqueness of African cultures. This situation gives impetus to the call for the development of a way of conducting research that is more suited to indigenous African contexts. The paper contains a reflection on the researchers' past research experiences within African socio-cultural contexts. We aim to share our experiences on a research study that we conducted in Zimbabwe with the Vatsonga of Southern Africa; one of the ethnic groups that adopt an Afrocentric worldview. We discuss how we implemented theoretical perspectives, research methods, and research ethical considerations. We found that we had to adapt the implementation of our research to be aligned with the norms and practices of the Vatsonga. Research ethical considerations are highlighted as an important step towards fostering indigenised research on the continent. In addition, we propose the dissemination of research findings to include indigenous communities where the research has been conducted. This should be done through community meetings or workshops as the African people follow an oral-based tradition of knowledge transmission. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for African literature to guide researchers in conducting research studies in indigenous African communities.

KEY TERMS: research methods, indigenous contexts, Southern Africa, Vatsonga people, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

The social work profession was developed in Western contexts, especially in Europe and America. Even though the professional identity grew in the regions mentioned, social work was being practiced everywhere. For centuries, African researchers, students, librarians, and academics relied on Eurocentric research concepts contained in the European research literature. This scenario if it continues unabated has the potential to perpetuate the legacy of colonisation whereby Africa (servant) looks up to Europe and America (the masters) for guidance and approval on research issues. Many authors criticise the West for side-lining African knowledge in social work thus making social work foreign to the African context. This has led to calls for the indigenisation of social work to gain currency. To achieve indigenisation of social work in general and particularly in research would demand that Africans ought to research, write, and develop their theories, models, concepts, and designs that they are willing to utilise in solving various African problems. The paper is a reflection on the researchers' past research experiences within African socio-cultural contexts. Based on a study that was conducted with indigenous people, namely the Vatsonga of Southern Africa, we share our experiences. The paper will first provide a background to the study, followed by a discussion on the concept of decolonised research, the research methodology used, and reflections on our experiences of doing research in an African context. Furthermore, a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations will be provided.

BACKGROUND

Social work in most parts of Africa was introduced by colonial entities or by institutions such as Christian missionary establishments (Mkabela, 2005; Hollingsworth and Phillips, 2017). This naturally sidelined African knowledge as the colonisers taught social work from their socio-cultural perspective, negating the African worldview. As a result, Western models of social work were reproduced on the African continent, based on European methodologies and concepts. This Eurocentric social work had limited room for acknowledgement and use of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) (Makofane and Shirindi, 2018). The debates on decolonising research methodologies show how research "... is still steeped in the Euro-North American-centric worldview" (Shokane and Masoga, 2021:23). To reverse this historical injustice, social work practice in Africa should be informed by research done in Africa (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018). The apologetic stance towards decades of the decimation of African knowledge seems to have reached its end. This period is described by some as an 'epistemicide' that needs to be reversed (Tondi, 2021). A call for Africanisation and decolonisation of social sciences in general and social work in particular is gaining traction (Sithole, 2021; Tusasiirwe, 2022). To this end, some are calling for the adoption of Afrocentric methodology in social work research as a step towards Africanising the profession (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018). This would then liberate Africans from the restraints of Western thoughts, culture, and perceptions as Africans research and develop their African identity (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018).

The indiscriminate use of the Euro-North-American-centric worldview to conceive African research is not sustainable. The current tide on the importance of researching African indigenous communities using Afrocentric research methodologies needs to be sustained. This would lead to the regeneration of African cultural heritage and the sharing of that heritage with the rest of the world (Themane, 2021). If we want to validate research (accountability), we need to consider methods that will be relevant to and acceptable to Sub-Saharan Africa. This situation gives impetus to the call for the development of a way of conducting research that is more suited to indigenous African contexts. Efforts to indigenise decolonise, and Africanise social work find themselves having to compete with the calls to universalise and internationalise social work. Universal social work assumes that there should be one world and one social work guided by a common knowledge base (Gray, 2005). In our view the concept of internationalisation of social work is noble, however, the challenge emanates from a situation whereby European and North American theories, concepts, models, and knowledge are used as the benchmark for international social work standards. Africa then becomes a passive recipient of Eurocentric knowledge in the name of universal social work. This amounts to professional imperialism creeping in, described "...as trends within social work which promote the dominance of Western worldviews over diverse local and indigenous cultural perspectives" (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018).Therefore, calls for universal social work would only carry meaning in Africa if there is room for Africa to equally influence the social work debates on the global stage.

DECOLONISATION AND AFRICANISATION OF RESEARCH

Our paper is a reflection of our research experiences in a study conducted within an African context in a way to contribute to a trail of knowledge creation that enhances understanding of Afrocentric research methodologies. Africanisation and decolonisation are intricately linked terms with Sithole (2021) using them interchangeably. It is important to understand what is meant by the terms decolonisation of research if we are to understand the

process of building an Afrocentric worldview of research. The decolonisation of research is viewed as a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation are enabled by referring to their local contexts (Chilisa, 2019). Social workers should use their practice skills of reflection and reflexivity to advance the decolonisation of social work (Gross and Kufeyani, 2021). Those who are pessimistic about an African identity argue that Africa is not homogeneous hence it is difficult to have an African philosophy. Contrary to this view, the Afrocentric worldview of the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa is diverse, but still, central concepts, principles, and practices that bind the African indigenous people could be identified (Thabede, 2008).The Afrocentric methodology is premised on the Afrocentric paradigm which deals with the question of African identity from the perspective of African people (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018:18; Makofane and Shirindi, 2018:28).Africa and its people have been researched for decades using Western research methodologies which have little or no respect for African culture, beliefs, spirituality, and the context in general typical of colonial approaches (Mogorosi and Thabede, 2018).To Africanise and decolonise social work research in Africa, African researchers should deliberately lean towards research methodologies that are in sync with the Afrocentric worldview.

THE PROBLEM: DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF COLONISATION

Since the advent of colonisation, Africa and its people have been researched through Western methodologies. The findings from these research studies in certain instances were irrelevant to solving African problems. Research must be relevant, as it informs our training and work, "...at the same time generating knowledge that is used for teaching" (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018:12). In addition, there is limited availability of textbooks on African research, leading to reliance on literature from Western countries. Despite the trickling in of African literature on Afrocentric research methodologies, the use of this literature by Africans is still limited due to perceptions that the Eurocentric textbooks are more authentic as compared to African literature. This is evidence of colonial 'hangover' whereby anything African is viewed as inferior, even by Africans themselves. Consequently, researchers in Africa are faced with the challenge of having to deal with the impact and lasting legacy of colonialism (Shokane and Masoga, 2021). The focus should be on challenging the dominance of Eurocentric-oriented approaches to research that have created a one-size-fits-all solution (Themane, 2021). Thus, Africa needs to focus on two main issues: knowledge creation and a robust decolonisation campaign to use African textbooks containing Afrocentric concepts, methods, models, theories, philosophy, and African cultural heritage. This would avoid a problem of under-utilisation of African literature despite Afrocentric textbooks being made available.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The article provides a reflection on our research experiences gained from conducting a study with the Vatsonga people of Southern Africa. The study was conducted in Mozambique and Zimbabwe involving 40 Vatsonga elders who are custodians of the Vatsonga cultural heritage. Fouché (2021) states that research is a logical and orderly process that comprises the following elements: a research problem, research design, empirical evidence, and conclusions. We discuss our reflections on the implementation of the study on the Vatsonga IKS with inclusion of these elements. We deliberately leave out the findings of that study to focus on sharing our practical experiences of the implementation of the research methods in an African context through what others term 'turning our sociological eyes on our own lives' (Roy, 2020). Reflexive research is described in detail as "...researcher consciously stepping back from the action to theorise what is taking place, and also stepping up to be an active part of that contextualised action." (Attia and Edge, 2017:33). Thus, in retrospect, we reflect on the study with the Vatsonga people in Mozambique and Zimbabwe to highlight relevant aspects of an Afrocentric way of doing research, as will be discussed in the following sections. During the empirical study (conducted by the first author) reflective discussions were continuously held with the other authors in their roles of research supervisor and social work colleague who had knowledge of the challenges related to child protection in the region. In addition, each author contributed reflections and literature towards the discussion in this article.

REFLECTION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VATSONGA CASE STUDY

The study aimed to explore the potential contribution of the IKS of the Vatsonga to child protection in an African context. The rationale for the study was based on the first author's experience of child protection interventions in Zimbabwe. Data were collected form 40 elders who were knowledge bearers of the Vatsonga IKS and 22 social workers who worked in the field of child protection. However, for this article, only the experiences of interactions with the Vatsonga elders are reflected upon. Time was dedicated to review literature on the background information on the conceptualisation and status of IKS prior to field research. This background information on IKS played a significant role in informing the problem statement and research methodology, for example the

selection of the study sample and the methods of data collection. One of the researchers is from the Vatsonga ethnic group and is familiar with large aspects of the Vatsonga culture. However, being from the younger generation, it was important to understand the culture from the perspectives of the older generation who were custodians of the Vatsonga IKS. A literature study on the history and traditional IKS of the Vatsonga was conducted to 'situate' the researcher in the study. Preparation for the research by studying literature and adopting a reflective stance was important for deciding on the appropriate research approach, design, and research methods. In the ensuing sections we reflect on our experiences with theoretical perspectives used in the study, literature study, research approach, data collection methods used as our experiences with ethical considerations.

1.   Theoretical perspectives

We adopted social constructionism and ecological systems theory to guide our study. We found these theories to be a good starting point to sensitise us to understand people's lived reality. Social constructionism made us aware of the fact that people construct their reality based on their perceptions, experiences, and culture (Schenk, 2019). Therefore, we were sensitive to the fact that we should not bring our own biases into the research situation and data collection and analysis. We approached the interviews with the utmost respect. This was especially important since IKS was relegated to the periphery in the past as not relevant, primitive, and not 'scientific enough' for use in modern society. Social constructionism meant that we had to use in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions which allowed us to capture the participants' lived experiences (Makofane and Shirindi, 2018). Ecological systems theory sensitised us to the encompassing influence of culture (in the macrosystem) on people's lives (in inner systems), but also, that culture was not static (chronosystem) and we could not take a blanket approach with all people (Louw, Louw & Kail, 2014). Whereas these two theories were suitable for an Afrocentric study which we conducted, we found ourselves relying heavily on Euro-North American-centric literature as they were limited African literature that expatiates on social constructionism and the ecological systems theory. There is a need for Afrocentric researchers to equally delve into the debates regarding these theories to ensure a decolonised view that researchers seeking to use these theories to guide their studies can rely on home grown views.

2.   Literature review

A thorough literature study was conducted on the difference between Western and Afrocentric worldviews, the critical importance of their IKS to the African people, and general guidelines on important aspects underlying the Afrocentric worldview. An overview of the history of the Vatsonga, an understudied people, was also obtained as background to the study. We had to understand the African research participant from a historical context hence we dedicated space to reviewing literature on the history and cultural heritage of the Vatsonga. In addition, the literature review included a conceptualisation of child protection to analyse the relevance of the Vatsonga IKS to the challenges and legal stipulations related to the protection of children. The literature study also helped us to identify the challenges that IKS experienced in the eyes of many Western scholars. We initially struggled to find recent African literature on these key concepts when we started the study in 2015. However, the availability of African literature on the phenomenon under study significantly improved in the years to follow especially from 2017 up to 2021 when we concluded the study. Thus, studying of the literature on an ongoing basis helped us to be up to date with trends and issues which emerged over the duration of the study. In addition to informing the rationale for the study, the literature review also informed the research approach that was followed (Fouché, 2021).

3.   Research approach, research type, and research design

The study aimed to explore the possible contribution of Vatsonga IKS to child protection strategies in an African context. The research was based on a qualitative research approach. Mabvurira and Makhubele (2018) are of the view that Afrocentric methodology shares the same characteristics as qualitative research methods. They posit that both methods assume that people use interpretive schemes which must be understood and that the character of the local context must be articulated (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018). Through the qualitative research approach, we managed to explore the participants' views in their own words. Based on the rich data collected on the Vatsonga IKS, we agree with the statement by Themane (2021:82) that quantitative research methods are not advised as they are unable "…to deliver a decolonised or Africanised indigenous community research because it relied on the traditional methods of conducting research which was brought over from Europe". We therefore suggest that Afrocentric researchers make use of qualitative research methods, which can be supported by mixed-methods research should they wish to portray quantitative data as well.

   Research in Afrocentric contexts must lead to meaningful change. Therefore, based on the views of the Vatsonga IKS custodians who participated in the study, a culturally sensitive child protection programme for social workers was developed and piloted with 22 child protection social workers in Harare, Zimbabwe, in

2018.Thereby we sought to turn our findings into social work services as dictated by the tenets of applied research (Jansen, 2016). Following on the feedback during the pilot programme, we are in the process of refining the programme that will be shared with the wider community of social workers and other child protection stakeholders in Zimbabwe. We believe that Afrocentric research should offer tangible solutions to the indigenisation agenda of social work services by converting findings into goods and services.

Shokane and Masoga (2021) advise that decolonising research involves the adoption of an Afro-sensed perspective that aims to understand the experiences of Africans. In our study, the case study design was relevant as it aligns with the constructivist paradigm that reflects the importance of the subjective meanings and perspectives of the research participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016)

4.   Population and sampling

As indigenous knowledge is held by the elders in the traditional African communities, purposive sampling was implemented to recruit the sample of the study that consisted of elderly Vatsonga men and women who were knowledge bearers of their IKS. Purposive sampling was therefore used (Strydom, 2021).The participants resided in the Chiredzi district in Zimbabwe and the Chokwe district in Mozambique. Their ages ranged from 60 to 90 years but also a smaller group of younger persons who were informed about their IKS and regarded as knowledge bearers were included in the study sample. Furthermore, the use of snowball sampling procedures ensured that we included the knowledge bearers of Vatsonga culture and IKS in line with the dictates of indigenous and decolonising research (Strydom, 2021). To this end, Rix, Wilson, Sheehan and Tujague (2019) assert that decolonised research is characterised by the recognition and inclusion of people in indigenous communities. The importance of the hierarchic structures in indigenous African communities was recognised by accessing participants with the help of the traditional leaders such as the headmen and chiefs who knew the knowledge bearers in their communities (Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa, 2019). However, we made efforts to ensure that those who were identified by the traditional leaders were only recruited upon giving their consent to participate. In turn, those who agreed to participate were asked to nominate people they considered knowledge bearers and we approached the nominees with an offer for them to participate. This approach was until 40 participants were recruited, 20 in each participating district. We found snowball sampling to be suitable for decolonised research as it fostered the inclusion of the marginalised yet knowledgeable people in the knowledge construction.

5.   Data collection

African people transmit their knowledge through oral tradition. In this tradition, indigenous knowledge is a tacit knowledge that is mostly undocumented, but transferred orally (Ossai, 2010). Language is a critical from of preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge (Khupe and Keane, 2017). Therefore, it was important to recognise that bearers of the Vatsonga IKS in most cases would be more comfortable with oral traditions. Interviewing was therefore found to be a suitable data collection method. Shokane and Masoga (2021) encourage researchers to consider the fact that local communities are more comfortable with oral methods of data collection. In addition, Owusu-Ansah and Mju (2013:2) warn against viewing the African oral tradition as simplistic as this conception misunderstands the rich complexities that are found in the oral tradition, for example in storytelling, folktales, poetry, praise, songs, and music.During data collection, respectful mutual dialogue in which the participants' superior knowledge on the topic was acknowledged as an important aspect to show respect for the participants, to ensure that rich information was collected, and to respect the oral tradition of knowledge transmission by African people. Robinson (2007: 172) describes culturally sensitive or appropriate interviewing as follows: "Culturally appropriate interviewing techniques consider how questions are asked, level of intrusiveness, directness, formality, forms of address". These aspects were considered to engage in data collection from a decolonising perspective.

The research participants were hence regarded as partners in the process of knowledge construction, which allowed us to tap into "the wealth of knowledge among the elders in African communities" (Shokane and Masoga, 2021:33). We realised and acknowledged the importance of language in traditional African communities; therefore it was of value to obtain the assistance of a research assistant who was familiar with different dialects in the *Xitsonga* language in addition to the primary researcher who is a *mutsonga* (a member of the Vatsonga ethnic group). This person signed confirmation of confidentiality. For publication, the interviews were translated into English. We believe that the role of the Xitsonga-speaking research assistant in the collection of data and the translation of interviews into English minimised the loss of the original meaning of concepts. Based on our experiences, we recommend that researchers carrying out studies with communities that do not speak the language must consider the use of native research assistants who would ensure that interviews are conducted in the participants' language.

6.   Data analysis and presentation

It was important for us that the research findings should be a true reflection of the views of the participants hence we adopted a thematic data analysis approach. To achieve this, interview recordings were transcribed into verbatim transcriptions. Interviews held in *Xitsonga* were translated into English and were further reduced by generating categories, key, and salient themes in the data. After reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, the research findings were presented in themes and sub-themes backed by verbatim quotes of the participants. To this effect, measures to enhance data quality were of significance and included reflective discussions with the study supervisor and the research assistant, who understood the different Vatsonga dialects. Also, peer debriefing was done through discussion with the third author, who had extensive knowledge of child protection in an African context. The presentation of the research findings was intended to provide a rich description for the readers to understand the views of the participants. This is in line with the thinking of Makofane and Shirindi (2018) who posit that the presentation of findings by themes and subthemes should include quotations expressing the exact words from the interview transcripts. Shokane and Masoga (2021) emphasise that indigenous research must focus on empowerment, in which the voices of the indigenous people are heard, their wisdoms are captured, and their lived experiences are told. In this way, indigenous research can contribute to the acceptance of diversity without judgement based on race or culture (Khupe and Keane, 2017). We found thematic analysis of qualitative data as suitable for Afrocentric research as it allowed for the capturing of the voices and the lived experiences of the participants.

7.   Ethical considerations

Research ethics provide rules and behavioural guidelines for researchers towards appropriate conduct towards research participants and other parties involved in research studies (Strydom and Roestenburg, 2021). In this section, the authors reflect on how research ethics would manifest in the study of the Vatsonga IKS. We observed several considerations in terms of ethical research practices; however, for this article, we reflect on the following ethical considerations: institutional approval, the importance of relational ethics and respect, consent to participate, and beneficence.

Institutional approval

Mogorosi (2018) posits that researchers must obtain ethical approval from their institutions before they carry out their research. Maintaining high ethics standards should be at the centre of a decolonised Afrocentric research to ensure that all participants, including those who are the poor, illiterate, and vulnerable, are treated with dignity and respect. Before carrying out the study we subjected our research proposal to the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee who approved it on 25 May 2017 under reference number GW20170520HS. We also sought permission from various government agencies and institutions that had an interest in the study such as the Mozambican embassy in Zimbabwe, the National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe, the ministry responsible for cultural heritage, and the Department of Social Development. Institutional approval not only guarantees the protection of research participants but also bolster the credibility of the researchers by the gatekeepers. All the gatekeeping structures and persons that we approached for permission to carry out the study in the two districts in Zimbabwe and Mozambique respectively, requested to see our institutional ethics approval letter underscoring the importance of getting the institutional approval.

The importance of relational ethics and respect

The Vatsonga, like other African cultures, are deeply rooted in values underlying ubuntu, which differs from the more individualistic Western-oriented approach to personhood (Mabvurira and Makhubele, 2018). Ubuntu emphasises the interrelatedness, mutual care, respect, and dignity of people. Khupe and Keane (2017) propose that African researchers need to develop research methods that embrace the participants' cultural values and lived experience. The concept of relational ethics as described by Boydell (2007 in Mogorosi, 2018) was, therefore, an important ethical consideration for our study. Chilisa, Major and Khudu-Petersen (2017) refer to a relational ethical framework as affording the researched with the respect and honour that the researcher would wish for the self.In our study, relational ethics were for example practiced in the way in which participants were recruited (snowball sampling) and in the important role of respect that was shown to the participants throughout, as discussed in other sections of this article such as the consent to participate. To gain access to the participants, permission was first gained from the local authorities. The principle of respect was a fundamental ethical principle in our research. The researchers showed respect to the participants as elders in their community as well as knowledge bearers of their IKS in the way in which they addressed them and conducted the interviews (Robinson, 2007).We presented the participants with a bar of soap as a token gift in line with a common practice among the

Vatsonga whereby a visitor does not come empty-handed and upon leaving their host also ensures that the visitor gets something to carry with them.

As a result of the mutual respect that existed between the principal researcher and the participants, some of the participants addressed the researcher as "my son". This was acceptable given that in the Vatsonga culture any older person refers to any younger generation as their 'child' whilst the younger generation reciprocates by regarding every older generation as 'mother' or 'father'. Consideration of literacy level and language was a way to show respect to elders who were more familiar with oral than the written transmission of knowledge. Another way of respect was in terms of acknowledging their spiritual beliefs as we devoted time to solicit for the participant's views on the role of ancestors and the dead in relation to the living. Various rituals ranging from birth rites, death rites, rites of passage to adulthood, naming rituals mong other rituals were explored because of an understanding of their role in child protection among the Vatsonga. Thus, we continuously reflected on the way in which the researcher showed respect to the participants' culture, level of literacy, and spirituality. This would mark a departure from a Eurocentric approach that might view African culture as harmful and pose European cultures as the civilisation that is good to all humanity.

Voluntary participation and consent to participate

All the participants had to provide their consent to participate. Not all participants could sign their names and therefore we hand to allow them to use their thumbprint or to put an 'X' on the informed consent forms as their signature. The primary researcher took time to explain the contents of the letters of informed consent to participants who could not read with a full understanding of the information. Therefore, researchers doing research among indigenous communities in Africa should prepare themselves fully to meet a significant number of participants who could neither read nor write. As the participants in the Vatsonga study were identified by means of snowball sampling, only those who indicated their willingness to participate were contacted. We considered this form of indirect sampling as a way of showing respect to the decisions of community members on whether to participate in the study or not. Obtaining participants' consent is a critical aspect of the protection of their rights (Strydom and Roestenburg, 2021). It could be considered in this regard to prepare an audio or video recording that explains the contents of the consent form in addition to the written consent form. We did not manage to do the same but reflecting on the process, we consider such measures as a possibility for use in addition to the written consent form.

Beneficence

We regard the principle of beneficence to be relevant to the study on Vatsonga IKS. Beneficence implies acknowledging the superior knowledge of the participants and knowing that sharing their knowledge would be used in practice, namely child protection in the case of the study. Mogorosi (2018) posits that beneficence relates to balancing the potential benefit of the research with the potential risk and harm that the research can cause. The study was undertaken to gain knowledge of how Vatsonga IKS could contribute to child protection and to subsequently develop a programme for social workers on this aspect. This aspect was communicated in the letter of informed consent. Also, the participants were requested to provide suggestions for working together with social workers on issues that they agreed upon, but also on matters that were seen as contentious such as conceptualisations of child labour. The principle of beneficence should be at the core of Afrocentric research in line with ubuntu philosophy that carries in it notions of hospitality, doing good to others, and not to harm persons. With the information obtained during data collection in the Vatsonga study, it was evident that the concept to 'do good' could benefit the participants and their society (direct beneficence) as well as the scientific community through the knowledge of an African culture and worldview (indirect beneficence) (Strydom and Roestenburg, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Khupe and Keane (2017) express the need for examples of research in the southern African context that can offer suggestions for indigenous researchers. In this article, we attempt to contribute to indigenous research by reflecting on the research methods used in a study of the Vatsonga IKS. Based on our reflections on our experiences of doing research within the African context, the following recommendations to Afrocentric researchers, academics, and students are made:

- African research studies can disseminate knowledge on African indigenous knowledge and culture, and can bring about a greater understanding of the diversity of worldviews in different socio-cultural

contexts. Afrocentric research studies could thereby place the African worldview on equal levels of recognition as the Western worldview that has dominated social research in the past.

- We believe that African research can only be credible if the methodological decisions are specific (Sefotho, 2021) and relevant to the African socio-cultural context. The Afrocentric worldview rests on the appreciation of the collective spirit and group solidarity, which differs from the individualistic perspective in Western contexts (Robinson, 2007). We support the adoption of an ethical relational perspective to research that "illustrates the importance of protection, restoration and revitalisation of valuable local knowledge" (Chilisa et al., 2017: 329). In this way, more rigorous research findings can be obtained in indigenous contexts.

- When researching IKS within an African context, one has to consider adopting a qualitative research approach with a constructivist research paradigm. This approach would give the researchers room to explore the worldview of the participants and understand the phenomenon under investigation better. We advise against the adoption of quantitative research approaches only as this would not give room to explore the lived experiences of those being researched.

- We recommend orally based data collection methods when doing research on social issues with local African communities. As was also the case in our discussion of the Vatsonga study, most IKS custodians are from the older generation who in most instances could not read nor write and are not conversant in English; hence the use of orally based data collection methods such as focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews are deemed more suitable. In addition, interviews must be conducted in the language known to the research participants and, if needed, a translator competent in the participants' language should assist in data collection and the translation of data transcripts. Such measures will ensure that the voices of the participants are heard and accurately represented.

- We further recommend that researchers engaging in Afrocentric research should devote ample time to review literature related to decolonisation, Africanisation, indigenisation, and IKS relating to research and social work. This would ensure that the researchers become familiar with Afrocentric philosophy and concepts to guide their ensuing research methods and processes. This knowledge could also support reflective research practices as the researcher could become aware of personal bias or conceptions that may influence data collection, data analysis and relational interaction with the research participants.

- Researchers must be aware of the social structures in traditional communities in order to follow culturally appropriate approaches for gaining access to research participants. Non-probability sampling techniques such as availability, judgemental, purposive, and snowball sampling are suggested for gaining access to participants that can offer information relevant to a particular study.

In the spirit of ubuntu, researchers in African contexts must honour the ethical principle of beneficence, for example by informing communities about strategies that could emanate from the research findings or utilizing research findings to bring about social change. To this effect, Chilisa et al. (2017) advocate for research studies that engage and transform African communities. Applied research studies, such as the study we discussed in this article, are recommended to empower marginalised or vulnerable communities. In addition, the principle of beneficence can enhance the researchers' accountability to the research participants. Feedback to research participants must be done through community meetings or workshops to respect the African traditions of oral communication and group solidarity.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have provided a literature background calling for decolonisation and Africanisation of research methodologies in social work that argues against the indiscriminate use of the Euro-North American-centred worldview in research. A reflection on the goal of the study and the research methodology that were implemented in a study on Vatsonga IKS were provided, including the theoretical perspectives, data collection methods, data analysis, and presentation of findings. We also reflected on some ethical considerations considered during the research study. We identified certain observations and experiences in the Vatsonga study that could inform Afrocentric research methods, for example qualitative studies, non-probability and indirect sampling methods and oral-based data collection methods. We conclude that there must be deliberate efforts by researchers to conduct research, create knowledge and reflect on experiences that can support Afrocentric research methods that put African philosophy and cultural heritage at the centre of social work research in African regions. The article is concluded by highlighting the need for African literature to guide researchers in conducting research studies in indigenous African communities.

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