

# UNPACKING EDUCATION 5.0 IN ZIMBABWE: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

*Zimbabwean universities are now being guided by Education 5.0. The study seeks to explore the space of the Social Work profession in the context of Education 5.0 and to establish the linkage between Education 5.0 and the Social Work profession. The study makes use of a qualitative research approach using a desk review and key informant interviews as a data collection method. The research found out that Education 5.0 can be used to address social problems being faced in Zimbabwe which is the core mandate of the Social Work profession. The study further found out that there is need to constantly update research technologies in the Social Work curriculum. This will produce a skilled innovative Social Worker who is culturally sensitive and technology friendly to address social problems. The study concludes that Education 5.0 can be used as an innovative solution for a Social Work model that is culture-specific. The research finally recommends the need for Social Work training to constantly update and incorporate online research techniques that will produce models to solve social problems.*

**Keywords:** curriculum reform, fourth industrial revolution, digital and social transformation

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, education systems are evolving to meet the dynamic demands of society, transitioning from traditional knowledge dissemination models to innovation-driven, skills-based frameworks. As economies become increasingly technology-driven and industrialised, education must shift from producing employees to nurturing entrepreneurs, innovators, and problem-solvers (Tirivangana, 2019). However, many education systems, particularly in post-colonial states like Zimbabwe, have remained rigid and detached from industrial and societal needs, resulting in a disconnect between academic qualifications and industry requirements (Alharbi, 2023). This misalignment has contributed to high unemployment rates. In response, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted Education 5.0, a transformative model designed to bridge this gap by integrating teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation as core pillars of higher education. Social Work, as a profession that evolves with societal needs, cannot remain static in the face of these educational and economic transitions. Traditionally positioned as a remedial and service-based discipline (Gray *et al.*, 2017; Kurevakwesu, 2017; Muzingili *et al.*, 2024; Raitskaya and Tikhonova, 2024). . Education 5.0 presents an opportunity to redefine Social Work education and training, ensuring that graduates are equipped with practical, problem-solving skills tailored to contemporary social and economic realities.

This study critically examines the position of Social Work within the Education 5.0 framework, exploring how the profession can integrate innovation and industrialisation into academic training and professional practice. Doing so highlights the implications for Social Work education, training, and practice, emphasizing the need for a more dexterous, solution-oriented, and development-driven approach that aligns with global and local socio-economic trends.

Higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe has undergone significant transformation, transitioning from colonial-era theoretical models to innovation-driven, heritage-based approaches. This shift is encapsulated in the transition from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0, a move to align the education system with national socio-economic needs (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology, 2018a). Education 5.0 represents a radical shift from an employment-focused system to one that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and industrialisation (Tirivangana, 2019). This transformation is particularly critical in Zimbabwe, where high literacy rates have not translated into economic empowerment or industrial growth, necessitating an education model that prioritises problem-solving and value creation (Alharbi, 2023).

Before implementing Education 5.0, Zimbabwe's education sector was influenced primarily by Education 3.0 that emphasized teaching, research, and community service (Ministry of Education, 2018b). This model did not address contemporary developmental challenges, primarily producing job -seekers rather than job creators (Chinyenze, 2020). Education 3.0, despite incorporating digital learning technologies, retained a traditional pedagogy that prioritised individual academic achievement over community engagement or industrial application (Brown *et al.*, 2010). Although it allowed for self-paced learning and real-world applications, it did not fundamentally transform higher education into an economic and social change driver. The lack of emphasis on entrepreneurship, industrialisation, and innovation created a disconnect between graduates and the labour market (UNESCO, 2017).

A comparative analysis of Education 3.0 and Education 5.0 highlights their fundamental differences, as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Comparison of education 3.0 and education 5.0 philosophies in Zimbabwe (*Moyo, 2022*)

| Education 3.0                                            | Education 5.0                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Digital learning                                         | Teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation     |
| Incorporates technology but retains traditional pedagogy | Community-based projects, problem-solving approaches, and experiential learning |
| Emphasis on 21st-century digital skills                  | Emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, and industrial application            |
| Limited focus on community engagement                    | Strong focus on collaborative learning and societal impact                      |
| Some attention to innovation                             | Innovation as a core driver of education                                        |
| Weak link to industrialisation                           | Direct link to economic and industrial development                              |

This comparison underscores the importance of Education 5.0 in realigning higher education to national development objectives, addressing historical gaps in Zimbabwe's education system (*Moyo, 2022*).

Education 5.0 expands the traditional three pillars of Education 3.0 by integrating innovation and industrialisation, ensuring that graduates are academically competent and equipped to create employment and drive industrial growth (*Murwira, 2019*). This shift is particularly relevant given Zimbabwe's economic challenges, where industries require skilled graduates who can drive innovation and self-sufficiency. A heritage-based approach is central to Education 5.0, as it seeks to leverage Zimbabwe's human and natural resource endowments to foster economic development (*Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology, 2018a*). Education 5.0 promotes indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), ensuring that education is culturally relevant and locally applicable (*Tirivangana, 2019*). This approach aligns with developmental Social Work principles, emphasizing community-driven solutions and sustainable development (*Midgely, 2014*). Furthermore, Education 5.0

challenges the "ivory tower" perception of universities as isolated from societal concerns, instead encouraging the integration of academic institutions with community development initiatives (UNESCO, 2017). By embedding problem-solving methodologies, field-based research, and industrial partnerships into curricula, universities can produce graduates who actively contribute to national progress (Murwira, 2019).

One of the most significant changes introduced by Education 5.0 is the emphasis on community engagement, positioning universities as active agents in societal transformation (*ibid.*). Higher education institutions are now expected to engage in applied research, social innovation, and entrepreneurial initiatives directly benefiting local communities (Moyo, 2022). In Social Work, this shift translates into practical, community-driven interventions, where students and practitioners develop context-specific solutions to address social problems (Chigudu, 2021). Therefore, Social Work education under Education 5.0 must incorporate interdisciplinary collaboration, technology-enhanced learning, and experiential training (Moyo, 2022). Education 5.0 also fosters entrepreneurial thinking, encouraging students across disciplines, including Social Work, to explore innovative solutions to social problems (Chogugudza, 2021). Through initiatives like social enterprises, cooperatives, and research commercialisation, graduates can actively contribute to economic empowerment and sustainable development. The industrialisation pillar of Education 5.0 also ensures that universities produce graduates prepared for formal employment and self-sustaining entrepreneurial ventures (Moyo, 2022). This is particularly significant in Zimbabwe, where formal job opportunities remain limited, necessitating a shift towards self-employment and innovation-driven economic activities (Murwira, 2019). Transitioning from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0 marks a transformative shift relevant in Social Work, where traditional remedial approaches must evolve into proactive, entrepreneurial, and

innovation-based models. While challenges remain in fully integrating Education 5.0 into Social Work education, the model presents immense opportunities for sustainable development, community engagement, and economic empowerment. By aligning higher education with national priorities, Zimbabwe can cultivate a generation of graduates who actively contribute to economic and social progress.

The integration of Education 5.0 into Social Work education necessitates a rethinking of traditional academic models. Historically viewed as a remedial profession, Social Work must now embrace developmental and entrepreneurial strategies to remain relevant and impactful (Midgely, 2014). Universities must, therefore, embed research, innovation, and industrialisation into Social Work curricula, equipping students with skills to design, implement, and sustain social interventions (Moyo, 2022). Despite these advancements, challenges remain in implementing Education 5.0, particularly ensuring that Social Work and other disciplines fully align with the model's objectives (Mutasa, 2022). There is still limited awareness among Social Work professionals regarding how to integrate innovation and industrialisation into practice, leading to a continued reliance on exotic, problem-oriented models rather than heritage-based, solution-driven approaches (Nyoni, 2023). Stronger collaboration between academia, industry, and policy makers is required to address these challenges. Social Work educators must actively engage with government and private sector stakeholders to ensure graduates are equipped with relevant, market-driven skills (Moyo, 2022). Additionally, universities must prioritise resource allocation for research and innovation, ensuring that students can access technology, funding, and mentorship opportunities to develop impactful social enterprises and interventions (Mutasa, 2022).

Education 5.0 marks a significant shift in Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education landscape, emphasizing teaching, research,

community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation. These pillars align closely with Social Work's mandate of advocacy, empowerment, social justice, and community engagement (Mapuva and Lunga, 2020). Education 5.0 presents a transformative opportunity for Social Work in Zimbabwe, reshaping the profession to be more innovative, community-driven, and development-oriented. By integrating entrepreneurship, technology, and industrialisation into Social Work education, practitioners can move beyond traditional remedial approaches to proactive, sustainable solutions. However, this transition must be navigated carefully, ensuring that ethical considerations, social justice principles, and client-centred approaches remain central to Social Work practice. By embedding Education 5.0's pillars into Social Work training and practice, the profession can play a pivotal role in Zimbabwe's socio-economic transformation, fostering inclusive development and sustainable social change. In the presence of these challenges, this intersection presents an opportunity for Social Work to evolve into a more proactive, development-oriented profession that not only responds to social issues, but also contributes to broader national development goals.

The Education 5.0 model seeks to transform universities into economic and social innovation hubs, moving beyond traditional knowledge dissemination to knowledge-creation, application, and commercialisation (Mapuva and Lunga, 2020). This shift calls for expanding roles beyond conventional remedial approaches for the Social Work profession. Social Workers can leverage Education 5.0 to contribute meaningfully to community development, policy advocacy, and industrialisation efforts, ensuring that vulnerable populations benefit from developmental initiatives (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). Transitioning from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0 requires Social Work education to incorporate technological advancements, entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary research. The profession must embrace evidence-based practice,

ensuring interventions are grounded in empirical research and tailored to the Zimbabwean socio-economic context (Chigudu, 2021). This approach fosters innovation and adaptability, enabling Social Workers to develop sustainable solutions for complex social issues.

A core tenet of both Social Work and Education 5.0 is community engagement. Social Workers are trained to mobilise communities, foster social cohesion, and facilitate community-driven development initiatives (Mapuva and Lunga, 2020). Education 5.0 reinforces this by encouraging universities to engage with communities in problem-solving collaborations that address socio-economic challenges. Through participatory models, Social Work educators and students can work with local communities to design innovative social interventions that address poverty, unemployment, and social inequalities (Chigudu, 2021). Universities adopting Education 5.0 must integrate field-based learning, where students actively participate in community service projects, research-driven interventions, and policy advocacy initiatives. This ensures that Social Work education is experiential, impactful, and grounded in real-world applications. Furthermore, Education 5.0 emphasises entrepreneurial skills, encouraging Social Workers to explore social entrepreneurship and address social problems (Chogugudza, 2021). Social Workers can actively contribute to economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods by establishing social enterprises, cooperatives, and community-led initiatives.

Ethical considerations have become increasingly complex as Social Work aligns with Education 5.0. The entrepreneurial and industrialisation focus of Education 5.0 may sometimes conflict with the altruistic nature of Social Work that is primarily client-centred and service-oriented (Mutasa, 2022). There is a risk of commodifying social services, where the drive for commercialisation may undermine the profession's ethical commitment to vulnerable populations (Nyoni,

2023). Moreover, Education 5.0's emphasis on technological innovation and digital engagement presents ethical dilemmas regarding data protection, confidentiality, and equitable access to digital resources (Gumbo, 2023). Social Work educators must ensure students are trained in ethical decision-making, balancing technological advancements with core Social Work values. To navigate these challenges, Social Work educators and practitioners must embed ethical principles into all aspects of training and practice (Moyo, 2022). This includes advocating for policies that ensure equitable resource distribution, particularly for marginalised communities struggling to access digital technologies (Mutasa, 2022).

Education 5.0 allows Social Work to transition from a problem-oriented approach to a developmental model. Developmental Social Work focuses on economic empowerment, capacity-building, and participatory development, ensuring that communities actively design and implement solutions to social problems (Patel, 2015).

A key aspect of developmental Social Work is community resource mobilisation, where Social Workers facilitate the creation of sustainable livelihoods (Chigudu, 2021). Education 5.0's community engagement pillar aligns with this approach, encouraging academic institutions to collaborate with local communities in poverty alleviation, health promotion, and economic development initiatives. Social Work students in Zimbabwean universities are increasingly engaging in community-based projects to enhance economic resilience, promote women's empowerment, and address youth unemployment (Nhemachena and Mlambo, 2020). These initiatives equip students with practical skills and foster a culture of innovation and problem-solving. Furthermore, Education 5.0's emphasis on industrialisation supports establishing small-scale industries and entrepreneurial ventures that address social challenges (Chogugudza, 2021). Social Work graduates are encouraged to explore social entrepreneurship,

developing projects that generate income while addressing social issues. This aligns with Green Social Work, where professionals integrate environmental sustainability into their interventions, promoting eco-friendly solutions such as sustainable agriculture, water management, and renewable energy projects (Mlambo and Tshabangu, 2022).

A participatory development approach is fundamental to Developmental Social Work and Education 5.0. In Zimbabwe, Social Work professionals advocate inclusive planning and policy-making processes, ensuring that community members actively contribute to decision-making (Patel, 2015). Education 5.0 supports this by incorporating community service and participatory research into university curricula, reinforcing the importance of grassroots-led development (Matende, 2019). Additionally, Social Work plays a critical role in addressing structural inequalities by advocating for policies that promote social justice, reduce poverty, and enhance access to education and healthcare (Nhemachena and Mlambo, 2020). Through evidence-based research and policy engagement, Social Workers can develop interventions that address systemic issues such as unemployment, gender inequality, and social exclusion.

The Developmental Social Work Theory, conceptualised by James Midgley (2014), emerged as a response to the limitations of remedial and welfare-based Social Work models. Traditional Social Work practices focused primarily on curative interventions, addressing social problems after they had manifested. However, Midgley (*ibid.*) argues that Social Work must go beyond remedial approaches and actively contribute to economic and social development. The theory emphasises empowerment, economic participation, and sustainable development, positioning Social Work as a proactive force in societal transformation (Kurevakwesu, 2017). Developmental Social Work aligns with global education and economic development trends,

making it particularly relevant to Education 5.0. Education 5.0 promotes teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation, resonating with Developmental Social Work's focus on proactive, empowerment-driven interventions.

One of the key characteristics of developmental Social Work is its proactive and preventive approach to social problems. Unlike traditional Social Work models focusing on remedial interventions, developmental Social Work Theory advocates for proactive and preventive measures (Mhiribidi, 2010; Midgley, 2014). This approach recognises that addressing social problems at their root cause can lead to long-term sustainable solutions. Education 5.0 emphasizes problem-solving and innovation, directly correlating with the preventive approach in developmental Social Work. Integrating research and industrialisation into education, Education 5.0 ensures that graduates develop solutions rather than merely responding to existing challenges (Murwira, 2019). This shift from reactive to proactive intervention is critical in Social Work education and training, as it encourages students to develop community-driven, sustainable solutions rather than relying solely on external aid.

In Social Work practice, this proactive approach aligns with the ethical principle of social justice, advocating for equal opportunities and empowerment rather than charity-based interventions. Social Workers must have innovative and entrepreneurial skills to anticipate and mitigate social challenges before they escalate (Muzingili *et al.*, 2024). Social Work methods such as community development that empowers communities through education and skills training, and social policy advocacy that develops policies that promote economic and social sustainability, become key tools in achieving this preventive approach. Another defining characteristic of the Developmental Social Work Theory is its strong emphasis on economic empowerment and capacity-building. The theory prioritises economic self-sufficiency through skill

development, entrepreneurship, and access to economic opportunities (Gray *et al.*, 2017). This principle is directly supported by the industrialisation pillar of Education 5.0 that ensures that graduates do not rely solely on formal employment but can create their opportunities (Tirivangana, 2019). By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, Education 5.0 aligns with developmental Social Work's commitment to economic empowerment as a means of poverty alleviation and social transformation. In Social Work practice, this characteristic resonates with the ethical principle of dignity and worth of the person, as economic empowerment fosters self-reliance and dignity by enabling individuals to take control of their economic future. The Social Work value of the importance of human relationships also plays a role, as economic empowerment is often achieved through cooperative networks such as community enterprises and social entrepreneurship. Social Work modules such as micro-finance and economic development programmes, encourage small business creation, financial literacy, skills training and vocational education, equipping individuals with marketable skills, are essential components of Social Work practice in this new paradigm.

The community-centred development approach of the Developmental Social Work Theory is closely linked to economic empowerment. The theory emphasizes that solutions must be locally driven to be sustainable (Patel and Hochfeld, 2013; Midgley, 2014:). This aligns with Education 5.0's prioritisation of community engagement, where universities collaborate with local communities in research and problem-solving initiatives to ensure the real-world application of academic knowledge (Murwira, 2019). The practical relevance of education is reinforced when students engage with communities, developing solutions that are culturally appropriate and contextually relevant. In Social Work practice, this characteristic aligns with the ethical principle of integrity that requires Social Workers to be

accountable to their communities. The value of service in Social Work is also emphasized, as encouraging community participation in decision-making (Mhlanga *et al.*, 2019). Social Work methods such as participatory action research that engages communities in identifying and addressing their challenges, and social mobilisation, encourages grassroots participation in economic and social development projects, becoming essential in ensuring that Social Work remains relevant in the Education 5.0 framework.

Another critical characteristic of the Developmental Social Work Theory is its inter-disciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration. The theory recognises that social issues cannot be solved in isolation; they require collaboration between various sectors, including education, business, and government (Midgley, 2014; Muzingili, 2016). This aligns with Education 5.0's emphasis on inter-disciplinary learning that ensures that students engage with multiple fields, including science, technology, business, and social sciences (Moyo, 2022). The holistic approach of developmental Social Work requires Social Workers to work alongside economists, engineers, and policymakers to develop sustainable solutions. In Social Work practice, this characteristic aligns with the ethical principle of competence, as Social Workers must be knowledgeable in multiple disciplines to address complex social problems effectively. The Social Work value of ethical practice is reinforced, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based and integrate insights from various professional fields (Muzingili *et al.*, 2024). Social Work methods such as inter-disciplinary case management, where Social Workers collaborate with health professionals, educators, and business leaders to implement comprehensive social interventions, and public-private partnerships, where Social Workers engage with private sector stakeholders to drive

social innovation and industrialisation, become increasingly important in the Education 5.0 era.

The Developmental Social Work Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the transformative potential of Education 5.0 in Social Work education and practice. The theory aligns with Education 5.0's pillars of teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation by emphasizing proactive intervention, economic empowerment, community-centred development, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Social Work education and training means a shift from traditional welfare-based approaches to entrepreneurial and innovation-driven methodologies. Social Work practice must evolve to incorporate industrialisation, business principles, and technology-driven solutions, ensuring that graduates are social service providers and change-makers who contribute to national development. Ultimately, integrating the theory with Education 5.0 ensures that Social Work remains dynamic, relevant, and impactful in addressing Zimbabwe's socio-economic challenges, paving the way for a more sustainable and inclusive society.

## **STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising desk review, electronic media analysis, and key informant interviews as data collection methods. A desk review used secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government policy documents, and reports on Education 5.0 and Social Work practice in Zimbabwe. To ensure relevance and rigor, literature was filtered using specific keywords such as "Education 5.0 and Social Work", "Social Work curriculum reform in Zimbabwe", "technology in Social Work practice" and "heritage-based Social Work education". The search was conducted across academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed, and institutional repositories of Zimbabwean universities. Inclusion criteria focused on recent studies (published

between 2014 and 2024), literature directly addressing Education 5.0 in Zimbabwe, and studies on Social Work curriculum transformation. Exclusion criteria eliminated outdated publications, non-peer-reviewed sources, and studies unrelated to the Zimbabwean context to maintain academic rigor and relevance.

Electronic media analysis was used to explore public discourse on the role of Education 5.0 in Social Work practice. Data was collected from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, WhatsApp, and Threads, where discussions on higher education reforms and Social Work practice in Zimbabwe took place. Posts, comments, and discussions were extracted and analyzed to identify key themes, professional concerns, and emerging perspectives on Education 5.0's impact on Social Work. Data was triangulated with literature and key informant interviews to manage objectivity and minimise bias, ensuring that opinions were verified against empirical and policy-based evidence. Content filtering excluded politically motivated posts that lacked substantive discussion or contained misinformation while prioritising contributions from professionals, students, and academic discussions related to Education 5.0 and Social Work.

Key informant interviews with practising Social Workers were conducted to gain practical insights into how Education 5.0 influences Social Work practice. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 10 practising Social Workers from Zimbabwe's 10 provinces. These Social Workers were chosen based on their direct experience with Social Work education and practice under different education models (Education 3.0 and Education 5.0). Their insights were valuable particularly in highlighting the limitations of Education 3.0, the opportunities presented by Education 5.0, and the challenges faced in integrating innovation, industrialisation, and technology into Social Work practice. Data from these interviews was analyzed thematically,

identifying recurring patterns and perspectives related to curriculum transformation, technological adaptation, social innovation, and cultural inclusivity in Social Work education.

This research adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect secondary and primary data sources. Regarding secondary data collection (desk review), ethical considerations included proper citation and acknowledgment of authorship, ensuring that all sources were credible, accurately referenced, and plagiarism-free. For electronic media data, publicly available posts were used, and private discussions were excluded unless explicit consent was obtained to maintain the integrity and privacy of online contributors. Regarding key informant interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising participants' identities and ensuring no identifiable personal information was recorded or disclosed. Furthermore, data was stored securely and used solely for academic purposes, in compliance with research ethics standards governing human subject research in Zimbabwe.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study highlight the transformative impact of Education 5.0 on Social Work education and practice in Zimbabwe. Five themes emerge, illustrating how Social Work can integrate technology, embrace collaborative learning, reform its curriculum, advance social innovation, and promote cultural inclusivity. These themes provide a framework for understanding how Education 5.0 can enhance the profession's effectiveness in addressing Zimbabwe's complex social challenges.

The study reveals that Education 5.0 allows Social Work education to embrace technology for a more personalised and learner-centred

experience. Digital platforms can be utilised for teaching, research, and practice. Social Work training must evolve to incorporate problem-solving case studies and innovative solutions. One key informant emphasized the importance of technology in Social Work practice, stating:

"In this digital era, we cannot ignore technology in Social Work. We must train students to conduct online research, use virtual tools for community engagement, and develop digital interventions for social problems."

This statement highlights the necessity for Social Work education to adapt to digital advancements, ensuring graduates are equipped with modern skills. Social Workers should explore how technology can be applied in case work, group work, and community development programmes. By leveraging digital tools, Social Workers can improve service delivery, enhance research methods, and create innovative solutions to social challenges. Education 5.0 enables Social Work students to think beyond traditional methods and explore new technology-driven approaches to social interventions. This shift is crucial in modernising the profession and ensuring its relevance in today's world. The ability to administer online therapy, conduct virtual community meetings, and use digital storytelling for advocacy are examples of how technology can be integrated into Social Work practice.

Education 5.0 promotes collaborative approaches to learning that aligns well with Social Work principles of teamwork and community engagement. The study shows that Social Workers can organise group activities, workshops, and online discussions that foster peer learning and collective problem-solving. This approach ensures that Social Work students and professionals work together to develop innovative, community-driven solutions. One key informant stated:

"Education 5.0 creates strong networks among Social Workers. We can collaborate on social innovations, share best practices, *and* develop community-based interventions that are more sustainable and effective."

This statement underscores the significance of teamwork and collaboration in Social Work practice. Social Workers can adopt modified online group work to reach larger client populations while accommodating busy work schedules. By working together, Social Workers can develop and implement effective solutions for national challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and access to healthcare. Education 5.0 also encourages inter-disciplinary collaboration, where Social Work professionals' partner with experts from other fields, such as health sciences, business, and technology, to design holistic solutions to social issues. Through community-based learning, students engage in real-world projects that challenge them to apply their knowledge and skills while fostering social innovation.

One of the most significant findings is the need for Social Work education to shift from its predominantly western-based curriculum to a heritage-based and contextually relevant curriculum. The study reveals that most Social Work training institutions still rely on problem-oriented and curative models, rather than adopting preventive and proactive approaches aligned with Education 5.0. A key informant remarked:

"We need Social Work modules that reflect our African realities. Our curriculum must integrate indigenous knowledge systems and focus on strategies that empower communities rather than just responding to crises."

This statement reflects the necessity of a curriculum reform that embraces local knowledge, values, and problem-solving approaches. Education 5.0 provides an opportunity to develop Social Work programmes rooted in Zimbabwe's cultural and socio-economic contexts. By incorporating IKS, Social Work education can become more effective in addressing societal challenges. Training should focus on equipping students with skills to design community-driven interventions, advocate for policy reforms, and implement sustainable development initiatives. A heritage-based Social Work curriculum would also encourage students to explore traditional healing practices,

community support networks, and local conflict resolution mechanisms as part of their education and practice.

The study discovers that Education 5.0 encourages social innovation and industrialisation, essential for transforming Social Work practice in Zimbabwe. Traditionally, Social Work has relied on remedial approaches, but Education 5.0 promotes a developmental approach emphasising solution-driven interventions. One key informant stated:

“For years, Social Work has been about reacting to problems. Education 5.0 challenges us to be proactive, innovate, and create solutions before social issues escalate.”

This statement underlines the need for Social Workers to shift from a crisis management approach to a developmental model that fosters long-term solutions. Social Work professionals can establish social laboratories and clinics as innovation hubs for addressing complex social challenges. Such initiatives can lead to the development of new models and frameworks for tackling poverty, gender-based violence, and youth unemployment. Education 5.0 supports the entrepreneurial aspect of Social Work by encouraging practitioners to think of ways to generate income while addressing social needs. Social enterprises, community cooperatives, and technology-driven interventions can all be developed within the Social Work profession to enhance sustainability. By embracing innovation, Social Workers can contribute to national development while ensuring that their interventions are effective and sustainable.

#### **PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN SOCIAL WORK THROUGH EDUCATION 5.0**

Another key finding is that Education 5.0 fosters cultural diversity and inclusivity in Social Work education and practice. The study reveals that Social Workers must be trained to recognise and incorporate multiple cultural perspectives, IKS, and community-based approaches. One key informant shared:

“A one-size-fits-all approach does not work in Social Work.”

This shows the importance of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into Social Work education. By adopting Education 5.0, Social Workers can enhance their ability to work with different communities and tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of various population groups. Inclusivity in Social Work also means ensuring that marginalised and disadvantaged groups access education and social services. Education 5.0 promotes equity by encouraging policies and programmes that address social inequalities. Social Work professionals can advocate for education reforms that provide more opportunities for people with disabilities, rural communities, and other vulnerable groups. By integrating cultural diversity into their practice, Social Workers can strengthen community cohesion, build trust, and develop well-received interventions by the populations they serve. Education 5.0 serves as a vehicle for promoting social justice and human rights, ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to contribute to national development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study illustrate the transformative potential of Education 5.0 in reshaping Social Work education and practice in Zimbabwe. The key themes demonstrate how Social Work can align with Education 5.0's teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation pillars.

The findings reveal that Education 5.0 allows Social Work education to embrace technology, ensuring students are well-equipped with digital research, practice, and service delivery skills. This aligns with Moyo (2022), who asserts that Education 5.0 encourages technology integration in higher education, fostering digital proficiency among graduates. Similarly, Murwira (2019) emphasizes that digital tools enhance problem-solving capabilities, a crucial skill for Social Work

practitioners. However, while Education 5.0 promotes technological integration, previous studies indicate that Social Work education in Zimbabwe has slowly adopted digital tools, relying heavily on traditional face-to-face teaching methods (Chigudu, 2021). This contrast highlights a lag in the adaptation of digital learning technologies within Social Work education that may be attributed to limited infrastructure, digital illiteracy, and resistance to change among educators. From a developmental Social Work perspective, integrating technology aligns with the theory's emphasis on proactive and innovative problem-solving (Midgley, 2014). Digital tools enable Social Workers to reach broader communities, facilitate virtual therapy, and use big data for social analysis—all of which enhance service delivery and research. However, ethical concerns arise regarding confidentiality, data security, and digital exclusion among marginalised groups (Muzingili *et al.*, 2024). To fully integrate technology into Social Work education, training institutions must prioritise digital literacy, provide access to ICT resources, and ensure ethical standards in digital interventions.

The study highlights that Education 5.0 promotes collaborative learning, aligning with Social Work's teamwork, community engagement, and participatory development principles. This finding is consistent with Murwira (2019), who argues that collaborative and experiential learning enhances problem-solving and social innovation. Similarly, Chinyenze (2020) notes that Education 5.0 shifts from individualistic learning to group-based knowledge production, ensuring students develop collective solutions to societal challenges. However, this contrasts with traditional Social Work education in Zimbabwe that has often been theory-heavy and assessment-driven, prioritising individual academic performance over teamwork and field-based learning (Chogugudza, 2021). The Developmental Social Work theory supports collaborative learning by advocating for community participation and inter-disciplinary cooperation in

problem-solving (Midgley, 2014). Social Work education must integrate collaborative teaching methods, such as case-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, and community-driven research. Furthermore, Education 5.0's emphasis on teamwork aligns with Social Work's ethical principles of social justice, human dignity, and respect for relationships (Mhlanga *et al.*, 2019). Integrating collaborative learning strategies into Social Work curricula will enhance students' ability to develop context-specific solutions through teamwork and participatory research, ensuring that future practitioners can effectively engage with communities.

A significant finding of this study is the need to decolonise Social Work education by shifting from western-based models to heritage-based and Afrocentric approaches. This aligns with Tirivangana (2019), who argues that Education 5.0 promotes IKS, ensuring that education is culturally relevant and responsive to local socio-economic conditions. Likewise, Moyo (2022) highlights that Zimbabwe's Social Work curriculum has historically been imported from Western contexts, leading to a disconnect between theory and local realities. The study findings contrast with previous models of Social Work education that have emphasized remedial and problem-oriented approaches rather than preventive and developmental strategies (Patel and Hochfeld, 2013). This contrast is due mainly to historical colonial influences that shaped Social Work as a welfare-based discipline rather than a development-oriented profession. The need for heritage-based Social Work education aligns strongly with the Developmental Social Work Theory which emphasizes contextual relevance, community empowerment, and sustainable development (Midgley, 2014). By integrating Afrocentric methodologies, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and traditional community support systems, Social Work can become more effective in addressing Zimbabwe's social challenges. This has critical implications for Social Work training, requiring universities to revise their curricula to incorporate local knowledge,

participatory development models, and policy advocacy training. Such reforms will ensure that Social Work graduates are equipped with culturally relevant skills that empower communities rather than perpetuating dependency.

The study demonstrates that Education 5.0 fosters social innovation and industrialisation, encouraging Social Workers to become entrepreneurial and proactive in addressing social issues. This aligns with Murwira (2019), who argues that Education 5.0 shifts higher education from producing job-seekers to developing innovative, problem-solving graduates. Similarly, Chogugudza (2021) highlights that Social Work must transition from a crisis-management model to a developmental approach prioritising sustainability and economic empowerment. However, previous studies indicate that Social Work education in Zimbabwe has traditionally lacked an entrepreneurial focus, with graduates often relying on government and NGO employment rather than creating self-sustaining initiatives (Muzingili, 2016). This contrast reflects the historical perception of Social Work as a non-commercial, service-driven profession that has hindered the integration of industrialisation and entrepreneurship into training programmes. The Developmental Social Work Theory supports social innovation and economic empowerment, emphasizing that Social Work must contribute to economic development through sustainable interventions (Midgley, 2014). Education 5.0 provides a framework for integrating entrepreneurship into Social Work training, encouraging students to develop social enterprises, community cooperatives, and technology-driven interventions to address social challenges. This shift has implications for Social Work education, requiring training institutions to include business development, financial management, and social enterprise creation courses. By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, Social Work can enhance its contribution to national development while ensuring the sustainability of its interventions.

The findings show that Education 5.0 promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity, ensuring that Social Work education embraces multiple cultural perspectives and IKS. This aligns with Moyo (2022), who notes that Education 5.0 fosters inclusivity by encouraging the integration of marginalised communities into higher education. Similarly, Nhemachena and Mlambo (2020) argue that Social Work education must incorporate diverse cultural perspectives to remain relevant in multicultural societies. However, previous studies indicate that traditional Social Work curricula have often been Eurocentric, failing to fully integrate Zimbabwe's IKS (Chigudu, 2021). This contrast is due to the legacy of colonial education systems that shaped Social Work as a Western discipline disconnected from African cultural realities. The Developmental Social Work Theory underscores the importance of cultural inclusivity in Social Work practice, advocating for interventions that respect and integrate local traditions and values (Midgley, 2014). Education 5.0's emphasis on heritage-based learning aligns with this perspective, ensuring that Social Work graduates are culturally competent and equipped to engage with diverse communities effectively. This has significant implications for Social Work training, requiring curriculum reforms incorporating cultural sensitivity, indigenous knowledge, and community-driven development approaches. By fostering inclusivity, Social Work can effectively address societal challenges while promoting social cohesion and national unity.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study demonstrates that Education 5.0 provides a transformative framework for Social Work education and practice in Zimbabwe. By integrating technology, promoting collaboration, reforming the curriculum, advancing social innovation, and fostering inclusivity, Social Work can become more effective in addressing contemporary social issues. The paradigm shift introduced by Education 5.0 challenges Social Workers to think beyond traditional methods and

embrace innovative, community-driven, and technology-supported approaches to social intervention. As Zimbabwe continues to implement Education 5.0, it is crucial for Social Work practitioners and educators to actively engage with this model, ensuring that the profession remains relevant, responsive, and impactful in addressing the nation's social challenges. In view of these findings, the study recommends the following actionable steps for strengthening Social Work education and practice in the context of Education 5.0:

1. Integrate research and technology into Social Work training to ensure that students develop digital skills for effective service delivery and evidence-based practice.
2. Adopt culturally relevant approaches by aligning Social Work education with heritage-based, Afrocentric models that reflect Zimbabwe's social realities and indigenous knowledge systems.
3. Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between Social Work and other fields such as technology, business, and health sciences to develop holistic and sustainable interventions.
4. Promote Social Work advocacy and policy engagement to ensure that laws, policies, and programmes are continuously updated to address evolving social challenges.
5. Support social innovation and entrepreneurship within Social Work education, enabling graduates to create self-sustaining community projects and contribute to national development.

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