Research Article

Centering African Voices: An Afrocentric Exploration of the Meaning of Occupation in Occupational Therapy

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ABSTRACT

Background: The concept of occupation is the foundation of occupational therapy practice. However, as a profession historically shaped by Western ideologies, occupational therapy's foundational constructs may not fully resonate with African worldviews. This study aimed to explore how occupational therapy practitioners practicing in Sub-Saharan Africa define occupation.

Methods: This study employed a critical qualitative methodology grounded in the theory of Afrocentricity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 occupational therapy practitioners across seven Sub-Saharan African countries. Participants were recruited through professional networks, and interviews were conducted via Zoom. Data were thematically analyzed, informed by Afrocentric theory.

Findings: Four themes emerged: (1) Occupation as Collective and Contextual Practice, (2) Embedded Emotional and Spiritual Meaning, (3) Language and the Limits of Translation, and (4) Flexibility and Evolution of the Meaning of Occupation. Participants emphasized communal values, spirituality, and dynamic understanding of occupation grounded in local contexts, languages and knowledges, challenging individualistic and static Western definitions.

Conclusion: These findings underscore the epistemological divergences between the Global North and the Global South's understandings of occupation, highlighting the need to reframe occupation through Afrocentric perspectives. By centering African worldviews, the study offers new insights for expanding global occupational therapy theory and practice. Incorporating these understandings into education, policy, and cross-cultural collaboration can foster epistemic justice and ensure more culturally responsive care and support. Global occupational therapy must embrace diverse epistemologies to remain relevant and equitable.

Key Words: occupation, Afrocentricity, cultural relevance, epistemic justice, decolonization, occupational therapy

INTRODUCTION

Occupations refer to the meaningful activities that people engage in during their everyday lives. It is a central concept in occupational therapy (Hasselkus & Dickie, 2024). However, the way occupation is defined and understood within the profession has been shaped primarily by Western ideologies, theories, and models (Akrofi et al., 2023; Hammell, 2019). These dominant definitions often emphasize individual meaning, independence, and productivity, reflecting cultural values that may not fully align with the worldviews and lived experiences of people in non-Western contexts (Akrofi & Njelesani, 2025; Guajardo et al., 2015).

In Africa, occupational therapy is a relatively young profession, introduced primarily through colonial and global development efforts (Crouch, 2010; Jansen-van Vuuren et al., 2021; Merwe & Rauch, 2019). While the profession began to formalize in North America and parts of Europe in the early 20th century, marked by the establishment of the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy in the United States in 1917, its introduction to most African countries occurred several decades later, primarily after World War II. For instance, South Africa established the first occupational therapy training program on the continent in 1942, and many other African nations only began training occupational therapists from the 1960s to the 1990s, often under the influence of colonial or international aid structures (Davy, 2000; WFOT, 2024). This significant time lag has contributed to the continued dominance of Western ideologies in education and practice across the continent.

There is a need to explore and articulate definitions of occupation that arise from African perspectives, using local languages, cultural values, and social contexts (Akrofi et al., 2025). This need is underscored by the fact that occupational therapy in many Sub-Saharan African countries continues to be shaped by Western curricula, models, and languages, which may not align with the communal, spiritual, and relational foundations of African societies (Dsouza et al., 2017; Jansen-van Vuuren et al., 2021). This misalignment can lead to conceptual and practice dissonance, where practitioners are trained to apply theories that may not resonate with service users' lived experiences or cultural understanding of health, function, and meaningful activity. As a result, the therapeutic process risks becoming less culturally responsive and less effective.

This study focuses specifically on how occupational therapy practitioners practicing in Sub-Saharan Africa define occupation from their own cultural, linguistic, and professional standpoints, as guided by Afrocentric theory. While occupational science offers several theoretical constructs to understand occupation, such as the transactional perspective (Dickie et al., 2006) and collective occupations (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2013), these are not comprehensively addressed in this manuscript. The aim of this paper is not to compare African definitions with existing Western constructs, but rather to center African voices and worldviews as a foundational step toward broader theoretical expansion. While these constructs are valued, this paper serves as a springboard for further research that could explore how such theoretical perspectives intersect with or diverge from African epistemologies.

Positionality

I am a Ghanaian occupational therapy practitioner who has studied and practiced clinically in Ghana. I have also received post-professional occupational therapy education in the United States. Throughout the iterative analytic process, I have drawn on my own experiences and positionality. I have also had discussions with colleagues, including occupational therapy practitioners working across the African continent, doctoral students studying qualitative research, occupational therapy professionals, and occupational scientists, this background has contributed to the interpretation and understanding of data. My cultural background as a Ghanaian occupational therapy practitioner, combined with my scholarly orientation toward Afrocentric and decolonial thought, shaped the design and interpretation of this study. While these perspectives influenced the questions I posed and the lens through which I interpreted data, reflexive practices such as memoing, peer debriefing, and member checking were used to minimize interpretive bias. This ensured that findings remained grounded in participants' narratives rather than solely reflecting my personal worldview.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Occupational Therapy in Sub-Saharan Africa

In 1942, South Africa became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to establish an occupational therapy program during a post-crisis phase that predated the apartheid era (Davy, 2000). In the initial years following its introduction, most of the population faced limited access to occupational therapy services due to apartheid policies and discriminatory laws (Dsouza et al., 2017; Joubert, 2010). Consequently, it can be argued that the conceptualization and early development of professional practice were not structured to address the heterogeneity of the people, particularly those with an African philosophical perspective (Dsouza et al., 2017; Joubert, 2010). This heterogeneity encompasses a vast array of ethnic groups, indigenous languages, belief systems, and cultural practices that shape the understanding of health, disability, and daily life. Similarly, occupational therapy was established in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa through globalization efforts, heavily supported by Western organizations. There are over 2,000 distinct languages and thousands of ethnic communities across the African continent, each with unique traditions, kinship structures, and religious affiliations (Hammarström, 2018). The uniform application of Western models has often failed to reflect local understandings of personhood, healing, and collective responsibility (Akrofi et al., 2025). Consequently, the development of occupational therapy in Sub-Saharan Africa has frequently lacked alignment with the lived realities and values of the populations it serves.

Data from the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) indicates that there are currently 25 entry-level occupational therapy education programs in 15 Sub-Saharan African countries (WFOT, 2024). Remarkably, 14 out of these 15 countries were formerly colonized by European and American countries, with 11 having English as an official language. In most of these countries, occupational therapy is exclusively taught in English. Despite the existence of WFOT Education program standards (WFOT, 2024), Western ideologies continue to dominate most

educational programs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Akrofi et al., 2023; Dsouza et al., 2017).

The dominance of Western ideologies in the development and delivery of occupational therapy education across the continent has shaped how core concepts, including occupation, are taught, understood, and practiced. As a result, African practitioners are often required to navigate a dissonance between the theoretical constructs presented in their training and the cultural realities of the communities they serve.

Defining Occupation

The concept of occupation is foundational to occupational therapy; yet its definition remains contested and is often rooted in Western, individualistic perspectives (Pierce, 2024; Hasselkus & Dickie, 2024; McColl, 2024). Dominant discourse in the field assumes that the value and meaning of occupation are primarily determined by the individual engaging in the activity (AOTA, 2020; Christiansen, 1999; Pierce, 2001; Reed et al., 2011). This framing, while useful, may obscure the communal, spiritual, and contextual dimensions of occupation emphasized in many non-Western cultures.

Occupational scientists have a responsibility to critically explore and redefine what occupation means, particularly in ways that reflect diverse historical and cultural realities. As Reed et al. (2013) argue, scholars must interrogate and transmit evolving ideas about occupation to deepen understanding of what it means to be human. This argument aligns with Pierce's (2024) assertion that occupational science was founded to provide a descriptive, discipline-specific body of knowledge that would elevate occupation to the same theoretical centrality that anatomy and physiology hold in medicine. Therefore,

defining occupation must be an ongoing, inclusive, and reflexive process that recognizes occupation not just as an individual action, but as a culturally embedded, socially constructed, and potentially collective experience (Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015; Kiepek, 2021). This is especially critical when engaging with contexts such as Africa, where communal values, spirituality, and ancestral knowledge systems shape daily life and give meaning to daily activities (Bosire et al, 2021; Ephirim-Donkor, 2021). Grounding definitions of occupation in such worldviews is essential to building occupational therapy practice that is both culturally responsive and epistemically just (Akrofi et al, 2025).

Despite growing scholarly efforts to promote culturally responsive occupational therapy, including significant contributions by African practitioners and researchers (e.g., Dsouza et al., 2017; Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2013; Guajardo et al., 2015), there remains a limited body of empirical research specifically examining how African occupational therapists define and conceptualize occupation from within their own sociocultural and linguistic frameworks. Much of the existing literature either adapts Western constructs or focuses broadly on practice challenges rather than interrogating the conceptual foundations of occupation itself. As a result, definitions of occupation in practice and education across the continent continue to be shaped predominantly by Euro-American ideologies, often with limited incorporation of African languages, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally specific worldviews. This disjuncture contributes to a profession that, while practiced in African settings, is not always grounded in African ways of knowing. This study seeks to address this gap by

foregrounding how occupational therapy practitioners in Sub-Saharan Africa define and understand occupation on their own terms.

METHODS

This study employed a critical qualitative approach, guided by Afrocentric theory, to challenge dominant ideas in occupational therapy and highlight African ways of knowing. It is part of a larger research project that explores what occupation means to African occupational therapists and how they use occupation-based approaches in their work. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at New York University with ID number: IRB-FY2023-7702.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in Afrocentricity as its guiding theoretical and analytical framework. Afrocentricity, developed by Molefi Kete Asante (2020) and informed by earlier work from scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1989), is an approach that centers African values, cultures, experiences, and agency in the production and interpretation of knowledge. It positions African people not as peripheral participants in global knowledge systems, but as central actors with valid and distinct worldviews.

By employing Afrocentricity, this study aimed to shift the analytical focus away from adapting Western models toward amplifying African voices and experiences as the starting point for knowledge generation. The framework supported a decolonial orientation to the research process, ensuring that definitions of occupation emerging from African occupational therapists were interpreted on their own terms, drawing from local languages, communal values, and

cultural practices. Afrocentricity also facilitated critical reflection on how colonial legacies continue to influence professional language, theory, and education in occupational therapy across the continent.

Methodologically, Afrocentricity informed the study's design, interview approach, and thematic analysis. It guided the formulation of culturally respectful questions, the inclusion of multilingual expressions of occupation, and the prioritization of relational and contextual meanings in data interpretation. Ultimately, Afrocentricity was not only a theoretical lens but an ethical commitment to honoring African epistemologies, promoting cultural authenticity, and contributing to the development of an occupational therapy discourse that reflects the lived realities of African practitioners and communities.

Participants

Using convenience sampling, the researcher purposively recruited 20 occupational therapy practitioners from seven Sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, and Uganda see Table 1. These practitioners, recruited through the researcher's networks in the Occupational Therapy Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Group (OTARG) and the Occupational Therapy Association of Ghana (OTAG), were all individuals who had practiced in various settings across the African continent. All participants were 18 years or older, fluent in English, and provided verbal consent. Inclusion criteria included licensed occupational therapy practitioners with at least one year of experience, fluency in English, and current or recent practice experience in Sub-Saharan Africa. Participants were not excluded based on

their familiarity with Afrocentric theory, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Country	Sex	Years of Experience	Educational Level	Language Ability
Ghana	Male	5	Bachelors	Multilingual
Ghana	Female	1	Bachelors	Multilingual
Ghana	Male	5	Bachelors	Multilingual
Ghana	Female	7	Masters	Multilingual
Ghana	Female	6	Bachelors	Bilingual
Ghana	Female	5	Bachelors	Multilingual
Ghana	Male	5	Bachelors	Bilingual
Kenya	Female	2	Bachelors	Bilingual
Kenya	Female	1	Bachelors	Multilingual
Namibia	Female	2	Bachelors	Bilingual
Uganda	Male	12	Diploma	Multilingual
Uganda	Male	7	Masters	Multilingual
South Africa	Female	6	Masters	Multilingual
Tanzania	Female	9	Bachelors	Bilingual
Tanzania	Female	2	Bachelors	Multilingual
Tanzania	Female	10	Diploma	Multilingual
Zimbabwe	Female	1	Bachelors	Bilingual
Zimbabwe	Male	14	Ph.D.	Bilingual
Zimbabwe	Male	2	Bachelors	Multilingual

Data Collection

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide to explore participants' understandings of the concept of occupation. The guide was informed by Afrocentric theory and designed to elicit culturally grounded perspectives. To ensure clarity and relevance, the interview guide was piloted with two occupational therapists and refined based on their feedback before being used in the full study. Sample questions included: "What is your understanding of occupation?", "Can you provide a literal translation of occupation from your local dialect?", "How does this differ from mainstream or Western understandings of

occupation?", "Would you describe an African understanding of occupation?", "How is occupation unique in your context?", "What occupations are most meaningful to your service users?", "What goals do you prioritize with your service users?" and "What guides your practice as an occupational therapist?"

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2023 and March 2024 using Zoom accessed through the researcher's university institutional account. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. In line with the Afrocentric framework guiding this study, culturally relevant African names were used as pseudonyms. These were randomly selected from a pool of common names and are not linked to participants' actual identities, places, regions, or ethnic affiliations. This approach maintained both anonymity and cultural coherence within the study. For clarity, pseudonyms such as 'Chinhoyi' were chosen from a pool of culturally appropriate African names and do not indicate participants' actual geographic origins.

Data Analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis using Taguette qualitative software, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework. The analysis was guided by a theoretical thematic approach rooted in Afrocentricity and a constructionist perspective. After familiarizing myself with the data through repeated listening and reading of transcripts, I engaged in open coding with support from trained research assistants. We collaboratively developed

and refined a coding guide to ensure consistency in interpretation.

Using Taguette, I applied the codes across the dataset and wrote reflective memos throughout the process to capture insights and guide theme development (McGrath, 2021). These memos helped refine the codebook and organize the data into themes that reflected the cultural and contextual meanings shared by participants. Member checking was conducted through informal follow-up conversations with selected participants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of emerging themes.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings from a thematic analysis of participants' definitions of occupation, guided by Afrocentric theory. Participants' narratives reflected deeply rooted African epistemologies, which challenge Western individualistic and decontextualized understandings of occupation. Four major themes emerged: Occupation as Collective and Contextual Practice; Embedded Emotional and Spiritual Meaning; Language and the Limits of Translation; and Flexibility and Evolution of the Meaning of Occupation.

Occupation as Collective and Contextual Practice

Participants repeatedly emphasized occupation as a socially embedded phenomenon, shaped by communal norms and collective priorities. Rather than viewing occupation as an isolated, individual activity, many participants described it as a shared engagement rooted in relationships and local customs.

"It also takes a collective nature; most of the occupations that we do in African context,

and mostly also even in the global south, are to do with, doing with other people, not necessarily doing it alone, and the bearing of who decides what is important is also a collective decision rather than an individualistic decision." Chidi (Zimbabwe)

"Sitting in the sun and observing the community… that is a meaningful occupation for our elderly." Zola (Namibia)

These accounts reflect Afrocentric values of Ubuntu and communalism, where the meaning of occupation arises through one's role within the community, not separate from it. The collective nature of decision-making and emphasis on observation, caregiving, and interdependence challenge the Western emphasis on autonomy and productivity.

Embedded Emotional and Spiritual Meaning

Several participants equated occupation with happiness, satisfaction, and a sense of life purpose. Activities such as sitting in the sun or preparing food were described as valid occupations because they bring joy and fulfillment.

"Anything that would make someone happy… something they would like to do." Zola (Namibia)

"Occupation is any activity that brings meaning and purpose to a person's life." Atieno (Zimbabwe)

Afrocentricity values the spiritual and emotional dimensions of daily life. These definitions move beyond functionalist views and elevate activities that nurture the soul, even if they appear passive or unproductive by Western standards. This speaks to a cosmological understanding of occupation

as essential to harmony, joy, and personal alignment.

Language and the Limits of Translation

Several participants highlighted the difficulty of translating the term occupation into African languages. Where translations existed, they often defaulted to "work" (adwuma, kazi), missing the broader meanings implied in occupational therapy.

"So, yeah, when I look at the local languages, I don't see any word which is directly synonymous with occupation. The only word I know is work. What majority of Ghanaians will understand occupation as is work." Eyram (Ghana)

"So, if I were to use my mother tongue, I don't have the words. That's so so terrible, but I think they would call it like [mabasa emazuva ose]. That would be sort of like, that would be what occupation is" Ganza (Zimbabwean)

These insights underscore Afrocentricity's emphasis on language as a vessel of worldview (Diop, 1989). The absence of a direct translation suggests that African understandings of meaningful activity may be conveyed through practice, rather than abstract terminology. This signals a form of epistemic dissonance, where colonial languages dominate professional discourse while indigenous languages reflect lived realities.

Flexibility and Evolution of the Meaning of Occupation

"Occupations are constantly evolving." When asked to define occupation, the study participants provided various definitions, ranging from daily life activities such as washing and dressing to broader interpretations encompassing any activity that occupies time and brings purpose to life. Participants emphasized that occupation is context-specific and dynamic, evolving based on life stage, cultural setting, and practice area.

"Occupation differs with context." Ganza (Zimbabwe)

"To be very honest, I think occupation doesn't actually have a specific definition in our context" – Eyram (Ghana)

Rather than adhere to a fixed definition, participants called for locally determined interpretations of occupation.

"And so I feel like we really need to sit and try to define occupation properly for ourselves and define what works in our context, just so that it can help people in their delivery when they want to explain what occupational therapy is to someone. After they are done explaining, the person on the other side would, you know, appreciate what they just shared and be like, "wow! You are doing this amazing stuff for me?!" Yes." Akua (Ghana)

Afrocentricity affirms this flexibility and multiplicity as a form of epistemic sovereignty, enabling practitioners to define and operationalize core concepts in ways that resonate with their sociocultural realities.

DISCUSSION

This study employed purposive sampling, consistent with its qualitative and Afrocentric design. The goal was not to generalize findings to all African occupational therapists, but to explore how practitioners across diverse contexts understand the concept of occupation. Participants were recruited broadly through professional

networks without excluding those unfamiliar with Afrocentric theory. Rather than selecting for a particular worldview, the study invited participants, through interview questions, to reflect on occupation from an African cultural lens. This approach allowed for a range of responses, some of which aligned with Afrocentric principles and others that revealed tensions or ambiguities in culturally rooted understandings.

Participants described occupation in terms of joy, relationality, spirituality, and community participation, perspectives that align with Afrocentric values such as Ubuntu, interconnectedness, and collective well-being (Asante, 2020; Molefe, 2020; Ephirim-Donkor, 2021). While they did not use the language of Afrocentric theory, their responses reflect Afrocentric worldviews grounded in lived experience. Therefore, the findings are not only interpreted through an Afrocentric lens but also represent expressions of Afrocentric thought voiced by the participants themselves and activated through the structure and intent of the interview process. Participants' difficulty translating the term "occupation" into indigenous languages illustrates the limits of colonial languages in expressing culturally grounded occupational meanings. This echoes Hammell's (2009) critique of dominant occupational categories as culturally bound and inadequate for capturing diverse human experiences.

These narratives also suggest a subtle but persistent tension between dominant Western occupational therapy ideologies and African cultural practices. While participants did not always articulate this tension through direct critique of Western epistemologies, it surfaced in their descriptions of occupation that emphasized communal values, spirituality, and relational well-being elements often overlooked in Eurocentric models (Hammell, 2009; Kronenberg et al., 2005). For example, many participants defined occupation as that which brings joy, fosters a sense of belonging, or supports communal continuity, rather than as an individually chosen activity focused on productivity or independence (Hocking & Whiteford, 2012). These locally grounded definitions stand in quiet resistance to dominant frameworks that prioritize autonomy, performance, and individual function (Ikiugu, 2005; Iwama, 2006). The absence of explicit comparisons may reflect the taken-for-granted dominance of Western models in professional training or limited access to critical discourse that invites alternative thinking (Turpin & Iwama, 2011).

Still, the dissonance between participants' lived experiences and the profession's dominant models reflects what some scholars describe as epistemic violence, the erasure or marginalization of non-Western ways of knowing (Ndlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2024; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). This silent disjuncture highlights the need to recenter indigenous knowledge systems and cultural epistemologies in the definition and practice of occupational therapy on the African continent (Dei, 2023). By attending to local meanings of occupation, the profession can begin to address its colonial inheritances and move toward more contextually relevant and socially just practices (Malfitano et al., 2014).

Several African scholars have made significant contributions to theorizing meaningful activity from within African cultural frameworks. Molefe (2020) suggests that individuals live meaningful lives when they embody the virtues or values they

prioritize. Idang (2015) explains that people's understanding of the world shapes their values and behaviors and that culture is preserved through activities that reinforce communal values. Similarly, Appiah (1998) highlights that values and belief systems are shaped by one's cultural and social environment. These insights point toward an understanding of occupation that is not only functional or purposeful but morally and relationally situated.

A critical question raised by the findings is whether occupation should be understood as a universal concept or as one shaped by cultural specificity. While some participants viewed occupation as universal, others emphasized the need for locally defined meanings. From a critical perspective, the presumption of universality may reflect a desire for validation within global occupational therapy discourses, which are shaped by Western norms (Akrofi et al., 2025). Indeed, different cultures have distinct ways of living, working, and making sense of the world (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022).

Drawing from transactionalism (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012), this study affirms that occupation is not merely a personal choice or internal trait but an emergent phenomenon arising from ongoing interactions between individuals and their social, cultural, spiritual, and political environments. In this view, occupation is inherently contextual. In many Sub-Saharan African contexts, the environment is deeply informed by Ubuntu a relational ontology that affirms "I am because we are" (Ramose, 1999). Participants who translated "occupation" as "happiness" in their local dialects reflected a worldview in which wellbeing is not an individual achievement, but a communal and relational state of being. From this Afrocentric perspective, the goal of occupational therapy may be reframed as promoting communal joy and collective well-being. This shift challenges dominant narratives of independence and productivity, offering an inclusive and culturally grounded reimagining of therapeutic purpose.

Implications for Occupational Therapy

The findings of this study have significant implications for the global occupational therapy profession. While this study is grounded in Sub-Saharan African contexts, the findings have broader relevance. As occupational therapy continues to expand internationally, the profession must critically reflect on whose knowledge is valued and how core concepts are defined. Embracing diverse, locally rooted definitions of occupation enriches the profession globally and ensures that therapy is relevant, respectful, and effective across cultures.

Occupational therapy education and practice must further explore the limitations of colonial languages and develop ways to integrate indigenous expressions and concepts of occupation, even when formal translations do not exist. The Occupational Therapy Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Group (OTARG) can utilize its platforms to foster solidarity, shared learning, and the co-creation of knowledge across Sub-Saharan African countries, thereby supporting culturally grounded occupational therapy practices.

In advocating for epistemic justice, African occupational therapy practitioners should be empowered to lead global conversations about the meaning and scope of occupation. Institutions and associations must create

opportunities for African leadership to shape the profession's future.

Limitations

One limitation relates to the use of English as the sole language of data collection. While participants were multilingual, conducting interviews in English, a colonial language, may have limited the expression of culturally nuanced or indigenous concepts of occupation. Some participants explicitly noted the absence of direct translations for "occupation" in their local languages. This highlights both the importance and the challenge of capturing indigenous epistemologies within occupational therapy research conducted in dominant global languages.

Additionally, the use of Zoom for interviews allowed for cross-country engagement but may have constrained rapport and limited non-verbal communication. While every effort was made to foster connection and cultural safety in the virtual setting, in-person interactions may have allowed for deeper relational engagement.

Future Research

To deepen understanding of occupation within Sub-Saharan African contexts, future studies should adopt more inclusive and expansive recruitment strategies. This includes intentionally reaching out to practitioners from underrepresented linguistic and cultural groups and conducting interviews in local languages to ensure that diverse epistemologies are captured. Incorporating interpreters or multilingual co-researchers could enhance linguistic accessibility and cultural nuance in data collection.

Further research is also needed to interrogate the historical entrenchment of colonial ideologies in occupational therapy education and practice in Sub-Saharan Africa. Historical and critical discourse analyses could provide insight into how curricula, textbooks, and professional norms have perpetuated Western worldviews. Such inquiries can inform efforts to decolonize training and build curricula that foreground African knowledge systems.

Acknowledgements

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study shed light on how African occupational therapy practitioners define and understand occupation, offering insights that challenge dominant Western frameworks and affirm the richness of African epistemologies. As the occupational therapy profession continues to globalize, embracing diverse, culturally situated definitions of occupation will be essential for ensuring relevance, equity, and effectiveness. African occupational therapists have a critical role to play in reshaping the profession from the inside out by articulating and legitimizing frameworks that reflect their own realities, values, and visions for well-being.

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