



Compatibility of Social Work Curriculum with Job Market Requirements: An Analysis of Gaps and Synergies in the Course Contents of Community Development

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Abstract

Community development is one of the widely practiced methods of social work profession for provision of social welfare services in the Pakistan soon after its inception in 1947. Historically, community development services have been rendered through various government departments as well as NGOs in Pakistan. Till date, a huge population of Pakistan is unable to access essentials of life, that is why community development method is widely practiced here for fulfillment of unmet needs of communities. The current study sets out to assess the compatibility of course contents of community development in terms of multiple skills learned during BS/M. A social work education and what they lack to fulfil requirements of the job market. Qualitative research method was adopted to achieve study objectives. Using an interview protocol, community development practitioners with at least 2 years of experience were recruited for in-depth interview. The responses were recorded using pen and paper method and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis technique. The findings revealed that certain basic skills such as communication, community mobilization and cultural competence are part of social work curriculum. However, other necessary skills such as project management, community-based conflict resolution, organizational development tool, identification of community resources and need assessment, asset mapping and data collection were not directly part of the curriculum and social work graduate faced hurdles in job hunting and sustaining them. Furthermore, dispensation of multiple roles and responsibilities such as community capacity building, advocacy and lobbying are expected from the community development practitioners in the job market which requires a specialized set of skills which social work graduates lack. The study concludes that curriculum of community development should be revised and modified in line with job market requirements. The study findings would be useful for social work academia and HEC curriculum revision committee for revising course contents of community development according to job market requirements.

Keywords: Social Work; Community Development; Course Content; Compatibility; Skills.

1. Introduction

In the Pakistan, community development as an approach was adopted officially after the advice of UN experts who visited the country in 1952 on official request. Considering gigantic social problems and massive unmet needs of newly born country, UN experts advised to undertake community development training programme, so that professionally trained personnel are available for responding to by then social problems. Hence the journey of community development as a method for addressing social problems In Pakistan started in the early 1950s and till date several programs have been undertaken by Government departments as well as private sector mainly NGOs (Shireen 2002).

Community development is a multi-skill practice, and workers have to hold a multiplicity of positions in professionalism and volunteerism which can be learned after gaining specialized knowledge and skills relevant to this subject (Healy, 2012). Mellor and Ivry (2002) added that community development professionals serve as catalyst and struggle for the mobilization of local people and involve them in the process of desired social change. For causing the desired social change, multiple skills and techniques are required such as identifying community assets, organizing voluntary organizations, initiating community dialogue, explaining project goals with community people, ensuring community participation, participatory planning, training and/or capacity building of community people regarding project, arranging seminars and awareness walks, sensitizing community people, resolving conflict, promoting local leadership, supervising , monitoring through regular field visits, making work plans and writing reports (Burke et.al., 2009). Based on this argument, the current study aims to identify gaps which exists between learned set of skills by social work graduates and required set of skills by the employer.

2. Brief view of history of social work profession

Historically, social work profession came into existence for addressing certain social questions such as why there are claims of productive and prosperous economy when poverty was increasing during 19th century in Europe and North America. To answering these questions, at the beginning of 20th century, working for social development was considered as an occupation which achieved the level of a profession by 1930. By that time, social workers were found serving in several diverse fields such as hospitals, government run schools, agencies serving families and children and last but not least settlement houses. The efforts to conceptualize and understand social work methods resulted in beginning and expansion of social work education (Stuart, 2013).

Social work education as a discipline in higher education is near about 100 years old over all the world and growing remarkably day by day (Midgley, 2000). According to Chaiklin, (2013), there were three early USA based schools from where social work education started; the first one was New York School of Social Work followed by University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration while the third one was Boston University School of Social Work. Available literature shows that first ever school of social work named Institute for Social Work Training was established in Amsterdam in 1899 (Healy, 2008).

Social work education prepares students for acquisition, development and application of knowledge for prevention of social problems. This selection and organization of the knowledge obtained at a particular time is called curriculum (Young, 1998). With reference to social work curriculum, Nanavatty (1990) found that “No curriculum design is determined on a blank slate or in a vacuum; it is confined by time, place and the prevailing social, political, economic and cultural context in a given country”.

South Asia is comprised of developing countries, where social work education was started by Western experts. That is why till date, Western philosophies of social work hold a maximum part in

social work curriculum in the south Asian countries (Noble, 2004). In Sub-Continent, social work practice has its roots in charity activities and voluntarily help for poor and underprivileged on humanitarian as well as religious basis. After independence from British rulers, there was a shift towards a welfare-oriented approach in Social Work in these countries, which after a long time shifted to a development-oriented approach and now focusing on justice and empowerment (Samta, 2016).

3. Beginning of social work profession in Pakistan

First in-service training course for social work education was started on 2nd October 1952 and lasted till 2nd April 1953. A group of 65 members was trained with the joint efforts of Government of Pakistan and United Nations Technical Assistance Administration (henceforth UNTAA). The training program was arranged at Khaliq Deena Hall Library, Karachi. The main purpose of training was to extend the horizon and strengthen the skills of trainees and to prepare them to become educators and leaders in the field of social work (Rehmatullah, 2002).

The course contents of six months training were according to the socio-economic needs and challenges which the country was facing by then. Major social problems prevailing at that time included refugee settlement, health related problems, illiteracy, poverty, urbanization and unemployment (Rehmatullah, 2002). For appropriately coping with these problems, Government of Pakistan started community development programs in year 1952 with the assistance UNTAA (Khalid, 2006). The practice of community development method was started at large scale in the urban and rural areas of Pakistan through a network of NGOs and Government departments since 1950s (Rehmatullah, 2002). Such as All Pakistan Women Association (APWA) was formed in 1948 by Begum Ran Liaqat Ali Khan and The Muslim Women's Association was formed in 1949, both these voluntary organizations worked for the settlement of refugees, networks of schools, health care centers, colleges and homes for destitutes.

Later on during 1954, University of the Punjab initially offered 2 years diploma course, at that time, the social work curriculum was reflecting the traditional pattern of Western social work education model (Rehmatullah, 2002). With the passage of time, West-based knowledge of social work was discouraged and efforts were made to revise the curriculum by adding indigenous methods which would reflect actual practices of social work in the country (Rehmatullah, 2002). However, till date a small amount of indigenous literature on social work has been produced by Pakistani academia, researchers and practitioners (Rehmatullah, 2002). As noted by Ranjha (2013), a few subjective books have been written by Pakistani scholars in the field of social work despite its history of more than seven decades. Some of the notable books include Social Welfare in Pakistan by Sheerin Rehmatullah (2002), Social Work Theory and Practice by Muhammad Khaile (2006) and Community Development: Concept and Practice in Pakistan by Zari Rafiq (2003). Some other books compiled for fulfilment of requirements of undergraduate students and provincial competitive exams are also available in Urdu and English language.

4. Upgradation of community development curriculum

As stated by Young (1998) that in case of a practice-oriented discipline like social work, curriculum development is more challenging because socio-economic situation changes with the course of time, consequently theoretical contents in the curriculum of social work education needs to be continuously revised and updated in line with the exiting societal needs and requirements. Professions which deal human relationships such as social work, necessarily have its foundations of knowledge accurately reflecting the values, ethics, culture, problems and needs of a that particular society, where it is

practiced (Rikhotso, 2013). Based on this argument, it is vital to indigenize curriculum and practice is necessary for meeting the changing requirements of the society.

As stated by Nikku (2014), social work education is in state of continuous dynamism, so course should be offered to students with the skills required to work in challenging community development settings. New research and information are being shared and exchanged around the globe, being a part of globalized world; curricula should be updated by introducing the innovations in the relevant fields of knowledge (HEC, 2009). The course on community development is being taught as major course in social work discipline in Pakistani universities as recommended by the national curriculum revision committee HEC (2015).

In year 2009, HEC curriculum committee revised course contents of community development putting more focus on theoretical components as given under in Table 1. First portion of course contents was about definitions, explanation, elements of community development along with sociological criteria of a good community and types of communities. While the rest of portion was about definitions, purpose, types along with goals of community development and principles of community development. In year 2015, HEC revised course contents of community development and included theoretical base for new set of skills.

Keeping in view emerging global trends, social work curriculum should be modified for inclusion of new courses such as social entrepreneurship, family counselling and information technology for better serving the un-served or under served. Likewise, social work faculty and students should also conduct research on rather than merely depending upon research studies conducted by allied social sciences (Riaz & Granich, 2023). In words of Shah (2020):

“The situation within Pakistan is crying out for immediate changes to fulfil the needs of the people. Before attempting to change conditions in the country—from the local to the national level—it is essential to prepare qualified social work professionals well versed in the techniques and methods of social work. This means the basis of social work education should be extended to include comprehensive policies and strategies, which can only be done in collaboration with social work educators, experts, and researchers.”

5. Need of revising course contents of community development in Pakistan

The field of community development has rapidly expanded in the recent decades. This development is characterized by demand for professionals who possess the skills, competence and capacity for positive engagement in the community development and playing leading role in finding solutions. However, due to some inequalities, education of community development is characterized by some flaws (Hains et al., 2020).

As found by Nikku and Hatta (2014), social work education in Pakistan contains a greater deal of Western model of social work. As literature suggest that social work is context-based profession having philosophy, so Western model and experiences cannot be applied in the context of Pakistan, which is predominantly influenced by Islamic ideology and Eastern culture. In the words of Shah (2020) “Before beginning a social work education programme, it is essential to get a clear picture of the current social needs and problems of the country for which social workers are being trained”. Curriculum design is directly related with preparedness of social work graduates which need multiple competencies in the wake of global dynamics. However, in the context of Pakistan core courses are generic in nature and are not meant to deal with specialized intervention methods (Riaz & Granich, 2023).

Table 1 <i>Revision of course contents community development</i>	
(Revised 2009)	(Revised 2015)
1. Definitions and explanation of community	1. Definitions and explanation of community Essentials, elements, and profile of community Types of community
2. Essentials of community.	2. Community organization definitions and purpose Types of community organization
3. Elements of community, security, norms, values, role and status, power, social control, ranks, facilities and advancement.	3. Community Mobilization a. Mobilization Process b. Role of Social Mobilizer c. Barriers to Community Mobilization
4. Types of community: Gemeinschaft, Gesellschaft, rural and urban.	4. Community Development a. Definitions, objectives and explanation of Community Development b. History of Community Development
5. Classification of communities, size, extent of dependency, density, age quality of life.	5. Principles of Community Development
6. Sociological criteria of a good community. Basic notions of a good community to socialization, social control, role of dedicated leaders a collective struggle for the solution of problems outward look to wider community, services and facilities, physical cleanliness, economic structure Aesthetic expression, willingness to change, Democratic trends etc.	6. Process of Community Development
7. Community organization – a vehicle to community development.	7. Approaches/models/techniques of Community Development
8. Community organization – definitions, purpose, types of community organization	8. Dimensions of Community Development
9. Definitions and Explanation of Community Development	9. Community Development Programs in Pakistan a. Government sponsored Program b. Non-government sponsored Program c. Local Government
10. Principles of Community development	10. Present institutional framework of Community Development in Pakistan
11. Goals and Process of Community development	11. Role of Social Worker in Community Development
12. Role of Social Worker in community development	

Source: Developed by authors based on HEC curriculum designed in 2009 & 2015.

The students should be taught new courses such as project management and skills in information technology in line with job market demands. In addition to it, different forums for representation of professional social workers are also required for recognition of social work profession in the country. Social work profession also needs to be recognized by Government of Pakistan for its role in community development (Riaz and Granich, 2023). Current socio-economic situation in Pakistan calls for immediate initiatives for responding to the needs of its huge population. While moving from local to global level, it is imperative to prepare well trained and well-equipped social workers who possess required skills and expertise for helping in this transformation. This requires drastic changes in social work education and curriculum to include current demands and need of the people. This task can be completed by strong collaboration and cooperation between academia, practitioners and researchers (Shah, 2020).

It is encouraging that social work education is in the right direction and its curriculum is sound and getting aligned with societal needs and requirements. Undergraduates and postgraduates are being taught by different pedagogical strategies. There is fair number of agencies that recognize professional social work. However, it remains a fact that social work model in Pakistan is heavily influenced by Western model i-e main philosophy, approach, literature and aims and objectives (Anwer, 2008). The current paper sets out to examine computability of course contents of community development which is one of its primary methods of social work profession. Its aims at identification of skills being taught to social work graduates and those which are needed by the employers.

6. Methodology

The current study aimed at examining compatibility of course contents of community development with job market requirements. Adopting qualitative research design, the study focused on social work graduates of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur for data collection. Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and/or Master of Social Work (MSW) degree holder serving particularly in the field of community development were taken as participants. Using non-probability sampling technique, data were collected from 20 participants. Social work graduates, who have minimum 2 years of experience of serving in community development field either in public or private sector, were considered eligible as study participant. An interview protocol was used for conducting in-depth interview of the participants and data were recoded using pen and paper method. The study participants were informed about their participation in the interview on the volunteer basis. Their verbal consent was sought before starting interview. Data was transcribed and elaborated based on the notes taken during the data collection process. Using thematic analysis technique, firstly the author fully familiarized themselves with data and then systematically identified and labelled meaningful words/terms and sentences and allocated codes. After that, codes were generalized before creating broader themes from them. Then the information relevant to each of the themes was put under them and elaborated.

6.1 Data Presentation

After data analysis, sub themes and main themes were drawn and presented accordingly. The findings have been organized in under three main themes namely skills needed for successful community development practice; skills being imparted to the social work graduates and skills required in the job market but are not part of course contents of community development. Here is description of the above themes.

7. Skills imperative for community development practice

The participants reported following skills are imperative for carrying out successful community development practice. i) communication skills, ii) mobilization skills, iii) report writing skills, iv) follow up visit, v) cultural competence, vi) survey and data collection, vii) community based conflict resolution, viii) interviewing skills ix) evaluation skill x) resource identification and utilization skills xi) community advocacy, xii) time management skills, xiii) leadership skills, xiv) resource management skills, xv) community capacity building skills, xvi) community need assessment skills, xvii) project management skills, xviii) community event management, xix) research skills, xx) analytical skills.

8. Synergy in course contents of community development and job market demands

Based on the experience as community development practitioners, study participants informed that following skills were being imparted to them during course of studies of BSW and/or MSW.

i) Communication skills

Communication skills are one of basic requirement for carrying out community development project. In community development sector communication skills are key for building rapport with community people. Communication is the way to conduct our message to community people (C1). Behavior change communication is most powerful skills through which one can prove its efficiency (C5). Effective communication skills are imperative for clearly conveying message such project objectives, roles and responsibilities of community people and addressing their concerns and queries (C10). At certain times, community people have doubts and suspicions about community development practitioners and the activities which are intended to be carried out. In such critical situation, communication skills of community development practitioners serve a great deal. S/he may clarify all the suspicions and may motivate and mobilize the same group of community people who were opposing it.

During our field work placement in the community development settings, we are provided ample opportunities for learning and improving communication skills. Our external supervisors send us to community for maintaining direct interaction with the community people (C14).

Active listening and responding in local language are key aspects of effective communication which enable us to convey our message with clarity and mobilizing the community people. During our field work training, in the initial days, our external supervisor used to take us in the community and asked us to observe how to interact with the local people and how to communicate them purpose of visiting them (C11).

ii) Mobilization skills

Mobilization skills are equally important for initiating and carrying on community development process. After making any particular community aware of some social problems, next comes its mobilization which ultimately leads towards addressing that problem. We are not only taught about mobilization skills in the classroom but also we can apply classroom learning into practice (C6). Generally speaking, community people are not willing to disturb their routine activities, so apparently, they would listen attentively but later than they take their way. In such condition, mobilization skills are imperative for achieving project objectives (C9). Community mobilization and its techniques in different community settings are part of community development course contents. This theoretical knowledge enables social workers to achieve set objectives.

iii) Report writing skills

Report writing is a significant skill needed by community development practitioner. In both community development and social case work settings, we were to prepare daily report of activities performed (C14). Although those reports were not that comprehensive and written in professional

manner but exercise remained much fruitful. However, there is need to improve report writing practice. Social work graduates should be fully capable of document their activities in an appropriate manner (C12). At the end of semester, there is comprehensive report covering all the professional activities carried out during that semester. In this report, social work students have to relate theory with their practice. This exercise enables students to integrate theory and practice for successfully achieving objectives. The report writing exercise for last 4 semesters of BS programme helps social work students to learn professional jargons and techniques to report about activities performed (C2).

iv) Cultural competence skills

Cultural competence refers to the ability of social worker to understand, appreciate and successfully interact with individuals from different cultural background. During our field work training of community development, we are being made learn that understanding and respecting diversified culture is key to enter in any community. In addition to it, we were also taught to possibly modify our dressing/look according to the local culture as it plays important role in getting accepted by the respective community. Likewise, ability to understand and speak local language is another significant factor that reduces mental distancing between community development practitioner and local community. By doing so, the community 'owns' the community development practitioner which helps him/her winning trust and cooperation of that particular community which is key to carry out developmental activities (C1).

9. Gaps identified in course contents of community development

The participants of study informed that they lacked following skills which were required as successful community development practitioner. i) community advocacy, ii) follow up visit, iii) community-based conflict resolution, iv) resource identification, v) need assessment, vi) community capacity building, vii) project management cycle, viii) project proposal writing, ix) interviewing, x) evaluation, xi) leadership, xii) survey and data collection, xiii) time management, xiv) project management, xv) community event management, xvi) research. The participants emphasized that these skills should be made part of the course contents of community development.

10. Discussion

The course contents of community developments have been repeatedly upgraded for making them according to current requirements in the job market in Pakistan. However, due to one of other reasons, social work graduates lacked certain critical skills which they need for securing and sustaining their jobs. The current study found that certain skills such as communication, community mobilization, cultural competence, report writing and survey skills are taught to the social work graduates at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. But there are certain other critical skills such as community advocacy, conflict resolution, community need assessment and analytical skills which are imperative for job seekers but are not imparted to social work graduates. Although, basic theoretical knowledge about these skills is part of community development course contents, however, there is need to put more focus on them. While revising the course contents of community development, community development practitioners should also be taken on board for their inputs. They know what latest developments and requirements are in practically carrying out our community development projects. Social work graduates ill equipped with necessary skills face more hurdles and difficulties in finding a job. Even if they are successful in securing a job, they fail to move upward if they do not learn necessary set of skills needed for attaining next level job from employers. As noted by Hains et al., (2020), the field of community development is continuously expanding and getting vast and hence

acquiring central importance. This calls for examining and understanding what makes a community development practitioner successful.

The requirements for the jobs are subject to rapid changes in global market. The changes revolve around technical refinement of the profession which entails ability and skills of the employees in relating with clients, colleagues and maintaining internal and external communication, solving their job-related problems and of their colleagues (Fabbris, 2007).

In the context of Pakistan, almost after 70 years of social work education, its knowledge base (relevance and indigenization) and up to the market requirements is still debated among academia. Social work as a profession is considered as an emerging one because of a huge gap between classroom teaching and its application in the field (Shah, 2018)

There is wide gap between classroom teaching and field work practice of social work in the context of Pakistan. As most of literature being taught to the social work students has been produced in the West, so the social work graduates face confusion while implementing such knowledge in a South Asian society like Pakistan. This situation results into poor alignment of social work theory and practice and hence poor efficiency and effectiveness of social workers (Shoukat et al., 2020). Rehmatullah (2002) noted that social work education and training in Pakistan was initiated for making development and modernizing the government system and addressing gigantic social problem existing by that time.

10. Conclusion

The current paper aimed at examining compatibility of course contents of community development with the job market requirements. In today's modern world, generally education is meant for finding and upgrading a job for living a respectable and socially acceptable life. Among other methods of social work profession, community development is widely practiced by public and private sector organizations. Since complexity and intricacy of community-based problems is ever increasing, so the community development practitioners need to learn and acquire up to date set of skills for responding to these problems. Although, course contents of community development have been revised and upgraded time and again, however, so far there is a wide and visible gap which creates hurdles for social work graduates in finding jobs. Professional skills being imparted to social work graduates are not sufficient for securing a viable job in the competitive market. The current economic challenges being faced in the Pakistan are further shrinking space for social work graduates in the job market. Therefore, course contents of community development should be revised in line with current requirements of the job market in Pakistan. HEC curriculum revision committee should take timely initiative for upgrading course contents of community development in particular and social work discipline in general. There is dire need to well equip and well train social work graduates for fulfilling requirements of job market.

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