

Variations in the Undergraduate Social Work Programs of Seven Universities in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Social work education at the undergraduate level became available in Saudi Arabia in 1970s, and was pioneered by King Saud University. At present, seven universities are offering a bachelor's degree in social work. The present study analyzed the differences in the programs offered by these seven universities. The results showed a large variation among the programs in terms of the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses and field training to the program's total number of credit hours. The study proposes that the allocation of hours for these courses must be standardized among Saudi universities.

Findings

This study gathered information that is summarizing the following:

- Introduction to history of Universities in Saudi Arabia
- The results of the study showed a large variation in the content of the programs of undergraduate social work programs in seven Saudi universities.
- This variation was evident in the total number of credit hours as well as the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses and field training to the program's required total number of hours to obtain a degree.
- Social workers graduates may obtain the same position (Job Title) although they may differ in their skills and knowledge.

Applications

Among the seven Saudi universities covered by this study, PNU runs a social work program that is more aligned with CSWE's accreditation standards. This could be attributed to PNU having a college that focuses solely on social work. In contrast, the social work programs in the other universities are offered alongside other programs under a department or a division in a department.

Keywords: Education, Undergraduate social work, Saudi Arabia

The first university, King Saud University (KSU), was founded in Riyadh in 1957 and included different departments in many scientific and humanitarian colleges. Among its present colleges is the Faculty of Arts, which houses the Department of Social Studies. The department was established in 1974 and first offered a bachelor's degree in social work or sociology in the academic year 1973–1974. The degree was separately offered to men and women.

Many universities followed suit. Of the 23 public and 9 private universities currently available in Saudi Arabia, six universities, apart from KSU, and a college offer a bachelor of social work as a degree. In 1975, the Higher Institute of Social work for Girls was established in Riyadh; it was turned into a college in 1991. The Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) included a social work college that solely offered a degree in social work when it was founded in 2008. A social studies department was also established in King Faisal University (KFU) in 1980, Qassim University (QU) in 1982, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) in 1982, Umm Al-Qura University (UQU) in 1984, University of Hail (UOH) in 2005, and King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU) in 2009.

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These universities' social studies department included the two divisions of sociology and social work. In 2005, Qassim University limited its offer to postgraduate studies in social work.

The discrepancies among the social work programs offered by these universities spurred the objectives of the present study, which aims to identify ways to develop these programs. The study described and analyzed the Bachelor of Social Work programs in seven Saudi universities by answering the following questions:

1. What are the general trends of social work programs in Saudi universities?
2. What is the proportion of the number of hours allocated for basic and supplementary courses to the program's required total number of hours in each of the seven Saudi universities?
3. What is the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses to the program's required total number of hours in each of the seven Saudi universities?
4. How many hours are allocated for field training, where applicable, in each of the seven Saudi universities?
5. Which university complies with the accreditation standards of United States-based Council for Social Work Education?

Literature Review

Fattouh (2001) stated that social work education in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries was prompted by that in Egypt, which has the oldest schools in the Arab region that follow the American educational model. Several critics commented that such a model does not comply with the conditions of developing communities. Nabhan (1986) earlier stated that social work based on a Western model must adapt to a community's circumstances. As such, proper adjustments must be made to the model so that social work strategies match the local conditions of the countries that implement them. Al-Saud (1998) called for an urgent need to review Saudi universities' social work education systems, particularly with respect to students' academic preparation and actual practice levels. A subsequent study by Aldarees (1999) found that the professional preparation materials of social work colleges in Saudi were inadequate to prepare students for practice in the social work field. Further, modern theoretical knowledge in social work was considered difficult to apply in practice.

Other studies have examined the different pedagogical perspectives in social work curricula, focusing on areas such as indigenization, modernization, and authentication. Ajubh and Rajab (1998) emphasized the importance of adopting the principle of focusing on social work in Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia. Shwaika (1998) underlined the principle that seeks both modernization and resettlement in social work. Afifi (2002) also believed that resettlement is important to adjust social work according to the circumstances of the developing community as well as its cultural, civilizational, and social heritage. The resettlement principle stemmed from the belief that social work was established and grew in a totally different community.

Ragab (1992) proposed that social work education must be drawn from different theoretical frameworks and apply practices from an Islamic perspective, including those on humans and life in general, without neglecting modern practices that do not contradict with the Islamic perspective. Jacob, Janitor and Recep (2002) added that the system must adopt modern trends in social work.

As for social work in Saudi Arabia, Ajlan (2006) concluded that it does not have a specific identity. He stressed the need to activate the developmental role of social work to suit the nature of Saudi society's development and for establishing a Council that will teach social work in Arab Gulf states, making the Council a professional reference for specialization. According to Jacob, Ali, and Rajab (2002), 11 fields of professional practice of social work are available in Saudi Arabia: juvenile care, family and childcare, youth care, prisoner care, special groups care, development, school, medical, social security, civic activity, and industry and labor.

Previous studies recognized a growing trend among Saudi universities to modernize their social work education systems instead of focusing on principles of resettlement and rooting in Islamic perspectives. The lack of focus on the latter two could be attributed to the lack of development support from the scientific and research fields in the form of updates on teaching methodologies. In contrast, research on the modernization of the social work education system has been abundant, particularly in Western schools, such as those in the United States. As such, many Saudi nationals have been provided with scholarships to obtain a bachelor, masters, or doctoral degree in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Bachelor's Synonym in Social Work. The United States-based Council on Social Work Education, a nonprofit association focused on graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education, identified seven characteristics of social work programs at the bachelor's level. First, a program should provide content on the practice of social work in accordance with the clients' patterns and levels of practice. Second, it should prepare the graduates to work with various communities. Third, it should provide content on the social contexts for the practice of social work and the changing nature of these contexts, behavior of organizations, and dynamics of change. Fourth, it should instill and promote the ethics and values that guide social work practitioners. Fifth, it should prepare students to become aware of and understand their responsibilities toward continuing their growth and professional development. Sixth, the bachelor-level curriculum must integrate humanities and social sciences courses that relate to social work. It must also include courses that provide the basics of professional practice. Last, the curriculum must be placed and organized as a cohesive and integrated entity.

The CSWE explained that the curriculum must include a range of fields related to one another. The basic ones include the values and ethics of social work as well as diversity, social, and economic justice targets, human behavior groups, social and environmental policies, social welfare, social work, the practice of social work, and research and field training.

Field training, in which students undertake social work under supervision, is an integral part of social work education. It provides opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in the classrooms to professional work institutions. At the bachelor level, field training allows students to work for a minimum of 400 hours in an institution to give them the appropriate opportunities to achieve targets.

- A. Develop cognition in the process of intervention.
- B. Deliver supervised practical experience in the application of knowledge and values as well as the ethics and practice skills to achieve human development and improve the environmental conditions that affect people negatively.
- C. Use professional oral and written communications that are consistent with the language of training and professional institution.
- D. Use professional supervision for the development of education processes and promote it with learning.
- E. The policy of the institution must be assessed and evaluated in the context of moral guidance.

Methodology

A descriptive Study was used a content analysis of the Bachelor's program plans in socialwork in Saudi Universities. It was obtained of these plans through the websites of seven universities; the indicators to analyze these plans are based on the number of credits of the program in general, and proportion of the constitutive sciences to specialized courses and the number of credit hours of filed education.

Results

To shed light on the history of social work education in Saudi Arabia, Table 1 presents the list of seven universities and the founding year of their respective departments on social work studies. KSU's social work education is the oldest among them, whereas KAU's is the newest. As such, KSU produced several of the leading figures in social work in the country, indirectly shaping the practice.

Table 1

No.	Name of university	College/department with social work program	Date of establishment	Location
1	King Saud University (KSU)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Social Studies/Division of Social Work Studies	1971	Riyadh
2	Princess NourahbintAbdurrahman University (PNU)	Faculty of Social Work	1975	Riyadh
3	Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSUI)	Faculty of Social Sciences/Department of Sociology and Social Work/Social Work Division	1982	Riyadh
4	King Faisal University, Al-Ahsaa (KFU)	Faculty of Arts / Department of Social Studies / Division of Social Work	1982	Al-Ahsaa
5	Umm Al-Qura University (UQU)	Faculty of Social Sciences/Social work Department	1984	Mekkah
6	University of Hail (UOH)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Social Studies/Social Work Division	2005	Hael
7	King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU)	Faculty of Arts/Department of Sociology and Social Work/Division of Social Work	2009	Jeddah

Table 2 presents the total number of hours required to obtain a bachelor's degree in social work, including the numbers of hours assigned for specialized and basic and assistance courses. Apart from IMSIU that requires 169 hours or more than the minimum 140 hours mandated by the ministry of higher education, the six other universities are barely complying with their required total number of hours ranging between 128 and 132 hours. Indeed, the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses to the program's required total number of hours varies significantly among the universities. Except for PNU, the six other universities failed to comply with the required minimum percentage that ranges between 55% and 60% of the program's total number of hours. PNU posted the highest percentage with 57.4%, whereas UQU and UoH come next with 53% and 52.3%, respectively. KSU has the lowest percentage with 25.8%. In certain cases, the basic and supplementary courses compensate for the specialized ones. For instance, KAU's supplementary courses posted 75% of the program's total number of hours.

Table 2

No.	Name of university	No. of hours allocated for basic and assistance courses	%To program's total credit hours	No. of hours allocated for specialized courses	%To program's total credit hours	Total credit hours to obtain a degree
1	King Saud University (KSU)	72	55.2	56	44.8	128
2	Princess NourahbintAbdurrahman University (PNU)	55	42.6	74	75.4	129
3	Umm Al-Qura University (UQU)	62	47	70	53	132
4	King Faisal University (KFU)	90	68.2	42	31.8	132
5	Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU)	83	49.1	86	50.9	169
6	University of Hail (UOH)	61	47.7	67	52.3	127
7	King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU)	95	74.2	33	25.8	128

Table 3 presents the total number of credit hours required to obtain a bachelor's degree in social work, including the number of hours required for each training level.

No.	Name of university	No. of hours allocated for each level	Levels	Total no. of hours allocated for field training
1	King Saud University (KSU)	3+8	8+7	420
2	Princess Nourah bintAbdurrahman University (PNU)	4+4+4	8+7+6	960
3	Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU)	9+6	8+7	240
4	King Faisal University (KFU)	2+2+2	8+6+4	96
5	Umm Al-Qura University (UQU)	4+4+4+2	8+7+6+5	224
6	University of Hail (UoH)	8+4	8+7	192
7	King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU)	3+3	8+7	96

Table 4

Nature of Science	Description	t of entire curriculum
Constitutive Sciences	The sciences on which the courses rely upon in constructing the theoretical framework (instead of from the specialized sciences)	10%–15%
Specialized Sciences	The sciences studied by the student, which are linked directly with forming his professional skills in the field of specialization, specific specialization, or field of work	55%–60%
Field Training	The actual application of what the students studied in various social welfare institutions in the community	20%–30%

The hours for field training are calculated based on four credit hours per semester. The hours are calculated as three credit hours for the seventh level, and eight for the eighth level. PNU is the highest in terms of the number of hours allocated for field training with 960 hours, followed by KSU with 420 hours. Of the seven universities, only these two have complied with the minimum requirement of xxx hours set by the Board of Education of Social work. IMSIU ranks as third with 240 hours, followed by UQU with 224 hours. KAU requires the lowest number of hours with less than a hundred, whereas the three other universities have lower than 200 hours. The significant disparity in the number of hours allocated for field training confirm the need for a review of undergraduate social work programs in Saudi universities.

Discussion

The undergraduate social work programs in seven Saudi universities vary in terms of the total number of hours required to obtain a degree as well as the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses and field training to the program's required total number of hours.

Among the seven Saudi universities covered by this study, PNU runs a social work program that is more aligned with CSWE's accreditation standards. This could be attributed to PNU having a college that focuses solely on social work. In contrast, the social work programs in the other universities are offered alongside other programs under a department or a division in a department. For instance, PNU has allocated 57.4% of the program's required total number of hours to specialized courses. Such percentage is consistent with the minimum requirement of between 55% and 60% set by the CSWE. In the other end of the spectrum is KAU with 25% of its program's required total number of hours allocated to specialized courses. KAU's curriculum scheme might affect the professional competence of its graduate students.

Meanwhile, PNU allocated the highest number of hours for field training with 960 hours, which is more than double the minimum requirement of 400 hours set by the CSWE. In contrast, KFU and KAU require up to 96 hours only, which is considered insufficient for the transfer of skills and experience of the practitioner social specialist to the trainee student who is obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Conclusion. Universities in Saudi Arabia began offering undergraduate social work programs in 1973. At present, seven universities offer a bachelor's degree in social work. Previous major trends in teaching social work revolved around the indigenization, modernization, and authentication perspectives. The modernization trend eventually grew owing to the lack of scientific research on the other two. At the same time, the universities have sent several of their teaching staff members to learn and study in Western schools, making them more aligned with the teaching tools and perspectives of schools in the United States and countries in Europe.

The results of the study showed a large variation in the content of the programs of undergraduate social work programs in seven Saudi universities. This variation was evident in the total number of credit hours as well as the proportion of the number of hours allocated for specialized courses and field training to the program's required total number of hours to obtain a degree. The study's findings showed that only PNU's curriculum is compliant with CSWE's accreditation standards for social work education program. The number of hours allocated for field training is twice that of the required number by the CSWE.

As such, undergraduate social work programs in the seven Saudi universities should follow a certain minimum level of education and training hours. Hence, the present study proposes three types of accreditation requirements. First, a social work program's number of credit hours should not be less than the international standard of 132 hours. Second, the proportion of number of hours allocated to specialized courses should be between 55% and 60% of the total credit hours. Third, the proportion of number of hours allocated to field training must be between 25% and 30% of the total credit hours. The levels of proportions of specialized courses and field training must meet the service requirements of the social work education program. The proportions of number of hours allocated to basic and supplementary courses must be adjusted accordingly. Social workers graduates may obtain the same position (Job Title) although they may differ in their skills and knowledge.

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