

EDUCATIONAL MEASURES TO DEVELOP SOCIAL WORK CAREER ORIENTATION AMONG STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: Based on an analysis of the theoretical foundations of career orientation education, the emerging requirements of social work in a digital society and current characteristics of student training, the article clarifies the necessity of fostering students' professional awareness, attitudes, motivation and career readiness. The proposed measures include diversifying career communication activities; integrating career orientation education into academic modules; innovating educational methods toward experiential, reflective and digitalized approaches; strengthening practical professional activities and building a modern, educational environment. These measures are expected to contribute to enhancing career adaptability among social work students in the context of digital transformation.

Keywords: social work; career orientation; career orientation education; social work students; digital transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation is profoundly reshaping social life, the labor market and the methods of delivering social services. In the field of social work, the development of digital technologies, big data, artificial intelligence and online platforms not only expands approaches to accessing, assessing and supporting clients but also imposes new requirements on the professional competencies of practitioners. In addition to professional knowledge, counseling skills, case management skills and the ability to work with individuals, groups and communities, social workers today are also required to possess digital competence, data management skills, online interaction skills and professional ethical awareness in digital environments.

Social work is a practice-based profession grounded in scientific knowledge, aiming to promote social change, strengthen social cohesion, empower individuals and uphold the principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] & International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2014). Accordingly, the education and training of social work students should not be limited to equipping them with professional knowledge and skills but should also focus on fostering proper and sustainable career orientation. Career orientation serves as the foundation for helping students correctly understand the profession, develop positive professional attitudes, strengthen career motivation and prepare themselves to adapt to changes in professional practice environments.

However, career orientation education in social work for students still reveals significant gaps. Career guidance activities have not yet been systematically organized as a comprehensive educational process but instead remain fragmented across academic modules, field practice activities, extracurricular programs and student support services. The integration between

professional awareness education, professional value cultivation, competency development and digital competence training remains limited. In particular, digital ethics, client data management and online social work practice have not been systematically integrated into training programs. This gap may lead to situations where students possess certain professional knowledge yet lack stable professional attitudes, long-term commitment to the profession and readiness for practice in new contexts.

From these considerations, researching and proposing educational measures to develop social work career orientation among students in the context of digital transformation is highly necessary. The article addresses the following research question: 1) What measures should be proposed to educate and develop social work career orientation among students in the context of digital transformation? 2) What principles should these measures be based upon to ensure scientific validity, practicality, and feasibility?

2. CONTENT

2.1. Concepts

Within the scope of this article, social work career orientation among students is understood as a relatively stable system of orientations related to choosing, committing to and developing a career in social work. This orientation system includes awareness of the nature, values, social roles and competency requirements of the profession; positive attitudes toward the profession; motivation for choosing and pursuing the profession; and proactive engagement in learning, training, practice and preparation for professional activities after graduation. Given that social work is a practice-based profession grounded in scientific knowledge and aimed at promoting social change, strengthening social cohesion and empowering individuals, students' career orientation is not merely an employment orientation but also a process of forming professional values, identity and responsibility (IFSW & IASSW, 2014).

Career orientation education in social work for students refers to a purposeful, planned and organized process conducted by educational institutions and related educational forces to form, reinforce and develop students' positive professional orientation toward social work. This process goes beyond merely providing career information; it also aims to cultivate professional values, develop competencies, strengthen career motivation and support students in gradually forming professional identity. In the context of digital transformation, career orientation education should be associated with the development of digital competence, self-learning ability and adaptability to changes in professional environments (UNESCO, 2022).

Accordingly, educational measures to develop social work career orientation among students can be understood as a system of pedagogical and social interventions organized by educational institutions and relevant stakeholders to develop students' professional orientation in terms of awareness, attitudes, motivation, and behavior. These measures should combine the core humanitarian values of the social work profession with the emerging requirements of the digital society, including digital competence, digital ethics, client information confidentiality and the ability to practice professionally on online platforms. Therefore, the application of technology in social work must go hand in hand with ensuring professional ethics, interaction quality and responsibility toward clients in digital environments (Reamer, 2018).

2.2. Principles for Proposing Educational Measures

The proposal of educational measures to develop social work career orientation among students in the context of digital transformation should be based on several fundamental principles.

First, the measures must ensure goal orientation, meaning that they directly target the formation and development of students' professional orientation in terms of awareness, attitudes, motivation and readiness for professional practice. Each measure should create substantial changes in how students understand the profession, believe in its values and proactively prepare professional competencies.

Second, the measures must ensure scientific validity and suitability to the characteristics of the social work profession. Social work is a practice-based profession grounded in scientific knowledge, aiming to promote social change, strengthen social cohesion and empower individuals, while also being based on the values of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). Therefore, educational measures should not only orient students toward employment but also contribute to the formation of professional values, professional ethics and professional identity.

Third, the measures must ensure practicality and feasibility, aligning with training programs, facilities, lecturers' capacities, field practice networks and student characteristics. Finally, the measures must ensure adaptability to digital transformation by integrating the development of digital competence, digital ethics, client information management skills and adaptability to digital forms of professional practice. This is particularly important as education and social services are increasingly influenced by digital technologies (Reamer, 2018; UNESCO, 2022).

2.3. Educational Measures to Develop Social Work Career Orientation among Students in the Context of Digital Transformation

Based on the identified concepts and principles, career orientation education in social work should be implemented through a system of synchronized measures that influence students' awareness, attitudes, motivation and readiness for professional practice. In the context of digital transformation, these measures not only help students understand and commit to the profession but also prepare them to adapt to new forms of professional practice on digital platforms.

2.3.1. Diversifying Communication Activities to Enhance Students' Professional Awareness of Social Work

Enhancing professional awareness is a foundational condition for developing students' social work career orientation. Accurate awareness helps students clearly understand the nature, social value, competency requirements and career prospects of the profession, thereby fostering positive attitudes, appropriate learning motivation, and proactive preparation for professional practice. This is especially important because social work is a practice-based profession grounded in scientific knowledge and associated with the values of social justice, human rights and respect for diversity (IFSW & IASSW, 2014).

Therefore, professional communication activities should be organized regularly, systematically and appropriately for students' information reception habits in digital environments. Communication content should clarify that social work is a professional occupation with its own subjects, methods, ethical standards and practice fields while also introducing career development directions such as school social work, medical social work, community social work, corporate social work and online social work.

Implementation methods may include professional seminars, social work career forums, interactions with experts, alumni and field practice organizations as well as the development of digital communication products such as short videos, infographics, podcasts, career newsletters and online career platforms. Communication content should also address emerging issues such as online counseling, electronic case management, client information confidentiality and professional ethics in digital spaces (Reamer, 2018; UNESCO, 2022).

This measure helps students move from intuitive understanding of their major toward scientific understanding of the social work profession, thereby laying the foundation for positive professional attitudes, appropriate career motivation and readiness for career development in the context of digital transformation.

2.3.2. Integrating Social Work Career Orientation Education into Academic Modules

Integrating career orientation education into academic modules is an important measure to ensure that career orientation for students is implemented regularly and continuously. Instead of being conducted only through extracurricular activities or short-term career counseling, career orientation education should be embedded into the content, teaching methods and assessment requirements of professional courses.

The integrated content should focus on helping students clearly recognize the relationship between academic knowledge and the practical requirements of the social work profession. In modules such as Introduction to Social Work, Social Work with Individuals, Group Social Work, Community Social Work, Counseling, Case Management, Social Policy, Social Work Practice and Social Work Internship, lecturers may incorporate topics related to professional values, ethical standards, areas of practice, employment opportunities and the competencies required of social workers. In particular, within the context of digital transformation, additional topics should include online counseling, electronic record management, social media in community intervention, client data confidentiality and professional ethics on digital platforms (Reamer, 2018; UNESCO, 2022).

Regarding implementation methods, lecturers may use professional scenarios, project-based assignments, case analysis, group discussions, personal competency portfolios and career development planning activities to help students connect academic knowledge with future career orientation. Assessment processes should also pay attention to students' ability to apply knowledge to specific professional contexts rather than merely evaluating theoretical memorization.

This measure helps transform career orientation education into an internal component of the training curriculum, thereby contributing to the formation of professional awareness, professional attitudes and self-directed career orientation competencies among social work students in the context of digital transformation.

2.3.3. Innovating Educational Methods toward Experiential, Reflective, and Digitalized Approach

Innovating educational methods is an important measure to promote students' active role in the process of developing social work career orientation. Given the practice-oriented nature of the profession, career orientation education in social work cannot rely solely on lectures but instead requires increased use of active learning methods associated with professional situations, practical experiences and students' reflective capacities.

During the teaching process, lecturers may apply methods such as case analysis, problem-based learning, role-playing, simulated counseling sessions, simulated case management procedures, group discussions and project-based learning. These methods help students approach specific social issues, identify the professional roles of social workers and practice applying knowledge to practical contexts. In addition, reflective activities through learning journals, practice journals, experiential reports or e-portfolios enable students to evaluate their own professional development, thereby adjusting their attitudes, motivations and learning plans.

In the context of digital transformation, innovation in educational methods should be associated with the use of online learning platforms, digital learning resources, academic forums, digital simulations and blended learning. The application of technology in social work education must go hand in hand with ensuring professional ethics, information confidentiality and quality interaction in online environments (Reamer, 2018; UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, educational methods should help students not only master digital tools but also use technology responsibly in professional practice.

This measure contributes to transforming career orientation education from passive reception into active construction, thereby helping students develop problem-solving abilities, reflective capacities, digital competence and readiness for professional practice in a changing society.

2.3.4. Organizing Diverse Practical Experiential Activities in Social Work

Organizing practical experiential activities is a significant measure for transforming professional awareness into students' professional attitudes, motivation and behavior. As a practice-based profession, social work requires students not only to master theoretical knowledge but also to engage directly with real professional contexts, specific client groups and diverse social issues.

Experiential activities may be implemented through field visits and professional observations at social work centers, hospitals, schools, communities, non-governmental organizations and social enterprises; participation in support projects for vulnerable groups; community communication activities or mentoring programs connecting students with alumni, experts and professional social workers. In the context of digital transformation, professional experiences should also expand to include participation in social media campaigns, observation of online counseling models, exploration of electronic case management procedures and the use of digital platforms for mobilizing social resources.

To ensure the effectiveness of this measure, educational institutions should establish stable collaborative networks with field practice organizations, integrate experiential activities into professional modules and require students to complete professional journals and reflective reports after each experience. These activities help students assess their professional suitability, identify their strengths and limitations and adjust their career development plans.

This measure strengthens the connection between training and professional practice, helping students develop professional emotions, reinforce their commitment to the profession and enhance readiness for social work practice in the context of digital transformation.

2.3.5. Building a Modern, Humane Educational Environment and Supporting Self-directed Professional Development

Building a modern and humane educational environment is a foundational measure that enables students to develop and strengthen their social work career orientation. The educational environment includes not only facilities, learning resources and technological platforms but also school culture, pedagogical relationships, student support mechanisms and networks connecting students with the professional community.

In social work education, the educational environment should clearly reflect the core values of the profession including respect for human dignity, social justice, community responsibility and respect for diversity (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). Educational institutions should develop learning and practice spaces such as simulated counseling rooms, social work practice laboratories, digital libraries, professional clubs, academic learning groups and career mentoring activities. These conditions enable students to experience, reflect, share and gradually form their professional identity.

In the context of digital transformation, the educational environment should also be expanded onto online platforms to support students' self-learning, self-assessment and personal career development planning. The use of digital learning resources, e-portfolios, online learning communities, online mentoring systems and professional databases helps students become more proactive in their career orientation and preparation process. However, digital environments must be organized in ways that ensure professional ethics, information confidentiality and responsible interaction (Reamer, 2018; UNESCO, 2022).

This measure contributes to creating a professional socialization environment in which students not only acquire knowledge but are also nurtured in terms of values, attitudes, motivation and awareness of lifelong professional development. This is an important condition for maintaining sustainable and continuous social work career orientation education throughout the training process.

3. DISCUSSION

Educational measures to develop social work career orientation among students should be viewed as an integrated system of coordinated interventions rather than isolated activities. Professional communication contributes to enhancing awareness; integration into academic modules connects educational knowledge with practical requirements; innovation in educational methods develops reflective and digital competencies; practical experiences transform awareness into professional behavior and a modern educational environment helps sustain professional motivation and identity. Therefore, the effectiveness of these measures depends on the ability to connect them into a continuous, goal-oriented and assessable educational process.

From an educational science perspective, social work career orientation education is not merely the provision of career information but rather a process of professional socialization. Through learning, practice, experiential activities and interaction with lecturers, experts and field practice organizations, students gradually internalize the values, ethical standards, and action methods of the social work profession. However, this process is meaningful only when students are placed in reflective learning and practice situations that enable them to identify their professional suitability, personal motivations and social responsibilities.

In the context of digital transformation, educational innovation should not be equated solely with increased use of technology. Technology can expand learning spaces and support new forms of practice, but it cannot replace the core values of social work such as empathy, respect for human dignity, social justice and professional responsibility. Without clear implementation plans, evaluation criteria and adequate support resources, these measures may remain superficial or symbolic activities. Therefore, social work career orientation education in the digital era should be designed toward integrating humanitarian values, digital competence, professional ethics and students' adaptability.

4. CONCLUSION

Educating social work career orientation among students in the context of digital transformation is an essential requirement for improving training quality and enhancing students' professional adaptability. This process is not merely about career guidance for employment selection but also about forming students' professional awareness, professional attitudes, motivation for professional commitment and readiness for professional practice.

Based on the identified concepts and principles, the article proposes five fundamental measures: diversifying professional communication activities; integrating career orientation education into academic modules; innovating educational methods toward experiential, reflective and digitalized approaches; organizing diverse practical experiential activities and building a modern, humane educational environment that supports self-directed professional development.

These measures should be implemented synchronously to influence students' professional awareness, attitudes, motivation and behavior. In the context of digital transformation, social work career orientation education should integrate the profession's core humanitarian values with digital competence, digital ethics and professional adaptability, thereby contributing to the formation of professional identity and the improvement of social work human resource quality.

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