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## **The Main Issues in the System of Professional Training in the Social Work Sector in Vietnam. Solutions and Prospects for Development**

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*This article gives an overview of current social work training issues in Vietnam and solutions are being implemented to address the major issues that Vietnam is facing. This article also refers to five major issues that currently directly affect the training and development of social work in Vietnam. Firstly, it is the training program framework (standard training programs). Secondly, the teaching staff in universities engaging in the training of social workers. Thirdly, practical training for students in universities and colleges in Vietnam. Fourthly, a lack of textbooks, teaching materials and electronic materials. Finally, the employment of students who have completed professional training in social work after graduation is a big problem.*

*Keywords: social work training, standard education program, vocational training, practical exercises, teaching materials.*

*Research area: general pedagogy, the history of pedagogy and education.*

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### **Introduction**

One of the important factors in the formation of educational space in the Asia-Pacific region is internationalized; an important highlight in higher education has become a comprehensive international cooperation symbol with the goals of study and sharing experiences in training and developing high quality human resources. Social work in Vietnam is seen as a new science sector, the training professional activities of this science has begun to be carried out since the 90's of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most

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of the training programs in Vietnam's universities are based on the experience and development reality of countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, for example: Japan, Korea, Philippines and Singapore, etc.

Over the past two decades, the formation and development of social work training in Vietnam has initially achieved many impressive results. For example, providing the labour market in the field of social work with a large force of trained workers with sufficient knowledge and skills to solve many problems in society. Contributing to social stability, economic, cultural and social development, etc., in the process of developing this science sector, the government and related ministries and agencies are interested in investing in financial, human resources, and construction of infrastructure facilities. There are many policies and legal documents on management and development of training that have been issued and widely applied to create a synchronous legal corridor for development.

However, today we are standing in front of the trend of fast and strong international integration. Besides the fact that there are good opportunities for Vietnam to develop this science sector, there are also many new challenges and major issues that directly or indirectly affect the orientation development of social work training. According to scientists and researchers in the social work sector of Vietnam, such as Nguyen Tiep (2008), Nguyen Kim Hoa and Bui Thanh Minh (2012), Le Thanh Hai (2012), Than Trung Dung (2015), Vu Manh Loi (2016), Nguyen Trung Hai (2017), etc., there are five major issues of the social work training in Vietnamese universities today (a structure of training programs; a force of lecturers participating in social work training; programs and contents of social work practice; lack of electronic materials, textbooks, reference and teaching materials; students' employment after graduation). These are big problems that cannot be solved in a short time, but with the synchronous help of the government, it will be possible to create a new impetus for the development of social work training during the period of international integration.

Based on the research results of Vietnamese and foreign scientists published recently, readers can understand more about the five major issues in social work training activities in Vietnam, specifically as follows:

**1. The status of the training program frameworks in social work in Vietnamese universities.** Based on the legal documents of the Vietnamese government, the universities are allowed developing their own training program frameworks, training plans in social work sector and take responsibility for the quality training. The Ministry of Education and Training only checks and evaluates the quality standards of output.

The autonomy form in training at the universities has been promoting a number of advantages, such as the active adjustment of the flexible training program framework, the possibility to choose to import the advanced training program frameworks of foreign universities and apply them according to the employers' needs and abilities. However, in the process of applying the training programs many shortcomings that need to be adjusted have been revealed, for example: many training program frameworks are not assessed, tested and evaluated for quality or are inconsistent with the reality in Vietnam, but are still used, etc.

a) Regarding the content of the training program frameworks, all the universities are generally built quite similarly, it can be divided into 3 main knowledge blocks: general knowledge; specialized knowledge and block-depth knowledge of professional social work, with the amount of training time fluctuating from 120 to 130 credits for bachelor's degree training (Nguyen Trung Hai, 2016).

b) Most of the training program frameworks in Vietnamese universities stipulate the following objectives of training to be achieved (criteria students must meet the standards after graduation). This conclusion is based on the results of interviews with teachers, compared to the same training systems in educational institutions in other geographic areas (Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong, 2017).

These training program frameworks all interact between faculties/sectors and different levels of education in the training process. In addition, each program has specific training objectives for each module, as well as the specific characteristics of each university. However, the training program framework of many universities also reveals many shortcomings. Some modules have overlapping knowledge of the interdisciplinary knowledge systems in the three levels of education (college, bachelor's and master's degrees), but the difference of the modules is still unclear, the content and duration of practical training almost do not meet the needs of students (Department of Social Protection, 2010).

c) Distribution of training time between theory and practice is not reasonable, many training program frameworks focus on theoretical and academic training, very little time and content is left for practice. Therefore, at the end of courses, students do not have enough skills and in-depth knowledge to solve specific problems in social life.

d) Some training program frameworks in the universities are not really attached to the actual needs of society. There is a lack of overall comments from experts, businesses recruiting and using trained labour resources. It depends largely on the abilities and capabilities of universities.

Thus, it can be said that the training program framework in the social work sector has been developed by universities and is being applied in the current training process. However, many training program frameworks have not totally met the requirements yet. The Government and the Ministry of Education and Training should continue to adjust and implement uniform training program frameworks on a national scale through promoting the strengths of each university when training this science sector.

**2. The issue of lecturers in universities participating in the social work sector training.** Teaching staff in universities and academic institutions play a very important role in educating and training the experts in the social work sector. However, lecturers with professional qualifications and skills, as well as training experience in this field, are still lacking in knowledge compared to the demand of the universities. In order to carry out regular training activities and to supplement this shortage, many universities have used the lecturers from other science sectors close to the social work sector, such as psychology, sociology, etc. In addition, every year universities are supplemented with young faculty members, with in-depth knowledge of this science sector. Those who trained overseas return to work at the universities, but they are all lacking in training experience, most of them only focus on training in academic theory, with little use of practical skills in the Vietnamese society. This has had a great influence on the development of training quality.

Many educational managers said that faculty members, who are training social work in many universities in Vietnam, do not have enough experience and pedagogical skills, which affects the quality of training this sector. According to the survey results of the Ministry of Education and Training, most of the lecturers having a master degree and doctorate are experts transferred from other sectors, such as psychology, sociology and history. This is one of the main issues that affect the training quality (Tran Xuan Binh, 2012).

Survey data (2010) on the need to use experts and social workers at 41/63 provinces and cities of Vietnam are shown specifically in the following Tabl. 1.

The research shows that the proportion of lecturers having a bachelor level is 23.4 %, lecturers with no qualification in the social work sector — 19,45 %, lecturers with advanced training on social work — 9.46 %, and lecturers with postgraduate qualifications account for 0.25 %. Therefore, it can be concluded that the number of lecturers with professional qualifications and skills in training social work is severely lacking, failing to meet the actual demand requirements of universities in Vietnam nowadays.

Table 1. Level of lecturers for vocational training for social workers at universities and colleges in Vietnam (Department of Social Protection, 2010)

No.	Professional Qualifications	Number of persons	%
1.	No qualification in the social work sector	12.654	19,45
2.	Training/retraining with short term (less than 3 months)	2.877	4,42
3.	Training of primary degree/certificate (from 3 to 12 months)	6.158	9,46
4.	Intermediate level training	2.939	4,5
5.	Professional intermediate level	21.550	33,1
6.	Professional college level	354	0,54
7.	Vocational college level	3.157	4,85
8.	Bachelors level	15.194	23,4
9.	Postgraduate level	163	0,25
	Total	65.046	100.0

With the aims of overcoming the shortage of teaching staff with professional qualifications and skills, many synchronous solutions of the government and related ministries have been implemented with initial positive changes, for example: limiting the employment of lecturers from other sciences. In particular, the Prime Minister's Decision No. 32/2010 approving the social work development plan for the period 2010–2020, which was issued and implemented in the first 5 years, has achieved quite impressive results. The Government has given aims to train about 60,000 professional employees in the social work sector by 2020, thus 35,000 social workers will be retrained, 25,000 social workers will be joined in short-term training courses, and this will contribute to achieving international standards: 1 social worker/1,000 people.

In addition, based on the survey results of the Ministry of Education and Training (2017), it can be seen that the number of highly qualified lecturers in the social work sector (masters, PhD, professors) are distributed unevenly between universities, between cities and localities in mountainous and disadvantaged regions across the country.

Thus, it can be concluded that the number of lecturers training social work in universities in Vietnam are lacking in quantity and weak in professional skills. The training needs of human resources cannot provide high quality labour market in the social field. In particular, the number of lecturers trained in the social work sector are still very young and do not have enough experience. In contrast, there are many faculty members, who have long-term training experience from other sciences.

These basic causes affect the quality of training. After graduation, many students do not have the professional capacity and skills to solve practical problems of modern social life. The Government has promulgated and applied a “strategic plan for social work training in Vietnam during 2017–2022”, which will help universities get the full number of lecturers, quality assurance on professional qualifications and skills to meet the needs of using high quality human resources at education and training institutions.

**3. Practice and practical training for students in universities and colleges in Vietnam.** Practice and practical training have a very important role in the training process of universities and other training institutions. Helping students, learners can apply their knowledge to enhance their professional skills. However, practice and practical training in most of the Vietnamese universities has not been given proper attention. For example, it shows in the training program frameworks of universities. Very little time is given to practice or training practice for students (from 3 to 8 credits/4 years).

Social work is a new science sector, so it is having many difficulties in practice and practical training for students majoring in this specialization. One of the biggest difficulties is the lack of practical and training facilities at universities and other training institutions. Many universities are not interested in investing in the upgrade of the facilities. In particular, there is a lack of professionals and instructors, who have experience and skills to help students to practice. In addition, the link between training facilities and social service systems in localities is not good enough. These factors have a direct impact on practice and practical training for students.

According to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (2017), there were 413 centres providing social work services in the country (including 37 social work centres with nearly 15,000 officials and social workers participating in nurturing and caring for over 41,000 patients). The Government has invested in the human resources and provided a huge annual budget for the construction and development of practice centres and training institutions in many localities, as well as for providing social services. However, according to the survey results (2017), only about 21 centres can meet the requirements of real practice and practical training. In addition, many newly established facilities and centres only provide some social services, such as medical care, legal aid, etc. On the other hand, some people answered that most of them are not aware of the types of social work services (roles, functions and subjects that have access to these types of services), so the demand for their use also have been limited (Ministry of Labour, 2017).

According to Tran Thi Thu Huong, it is necessary to regularly organize short-term training courses and refresher courses for instructors and lecturers, those who directly provide practical training at the practice centres so that they have better knowledge, skills to help students to practice effectively. The practice of social work sector needs to be more diversified with new practice areas, such as social work in hospitals, school social work, etc. In addition, universities need to actively build relationships between the parties concerned more closely, promoting consolidation of the apparatus structure, completing the legal framework and operational mechanism of practice establishments, contributing to good implementation of the social work development projects in Vietnam (Tran thi Thu Huong, 2016).

Thus, it can be said that the Government and related ministries and agencies, especially training institutions need to have synchronous solutions to build and develop the system of practice centres. Helping students and learners to have a practical environment and develop skills is an important and urgent task today. Training institutions need to have close links with businesses; the system of providing social services is operating locally for students so that they can have an opportunity to practice skills to solve specific problems of this science sector.

**4. Lack of textbooks, teaching materials and electronic materials on the social work sector.** Many scientists and researchers in the social work sector in Vietnam believe that this is a huge problem, which needs to be solved and overcome for the following reasons. The history of formation and development of social work in Vietnam has its own characteristics and was directly influenced by the country's development history. Vietnamese social work was imported from France, when the French army invaded Vietnam; they trained social workers to participate in their apparatus such as: hospitals, schools and social offices... Following France as the US military invaded Vietnam, social work training continued to be developed for the purpose of war service. Therefore, when peace was re-established (1975), all documents on social work were destroyed by the new government of Vietnam. In addition, after the government allowed the redevelopment of social work in Vietnam (1986), there were many researchers who have written and published many new books and documents, but they were very difficult to understand and contained inaccurate scientific data, many of which were misleading and could not be compared with the original ones.

This problem cannot be solved in a short time. In fact, there are very few documents on social work, such as books, textbooks and references. It is hard to find them in libraries, on websites, even in bookstores in the country's book market. Moreover,

although there are quite a few documents on social work written in foreign languages in some universities (University of Labour and Social Affairs, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University of Education, etc.), but very few staff, faculty and students can use them because they are written in English or French (Bui Thi Xuan Mai, 2010).

If we compare the social sector with the social work sector in Vietnam, we find that the social sector has developed and affirmed its position in training, as well as in the labour market. In contrast, social work is a new sector in the economy, so the research projects in this area are very modest (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, 2012).

In order to overcome the initial difficulties in teaching and research in this area, universities have used foreign materials or searched for relevant content from other sciences that are close to the social work sector such as psychology, sociology, history and medicine.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the source of materials, textbooks, and electronic materials on this science sector is very complicated for the training activities at the universities today. Many teachers and students must study and practice with enough materials, textbooks, and electronic materials on this science sector.

**5. Employment issues in the social work sector.** In Vietnam, the employment problems of social work students always attract the attention of many people.

Despite the fact that Vietnam do not have enough experts in social work, graduate students are not always able to find a job (Nguyen Tiep, 2008). Firstly, every year many localities across the country have plans to recruit social workers, but in the recruitment process, there are no specific criteria for social workers of government agencies, thus, many students cannot apply for a job. Secondly, in many organizations, mainly foreign organizations, candidates are required to have work experience and knowledge of foreign languages, especially English. This is probably the biggest challenge for graduates who have been trained in the social work sector at all educational institutions in Vietnam. After graduation more than 70 % of students do not know which institutions they can apply for. According to a survey conducted by the Youth Research Institute (2018), 70 % of students in Vietnam believe that the main problem now is employment after graduation. According to the Ministry of Education and Training, 63 % of university and college graduates are unemployed, 37 % have jobs, but most of them do not work in the specialities they trained for (social work sector). Recently, a research was conducted by the Centre for Political Research and Analysis at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (HVA) in Hanoi. The survey involved nearly 3,000

alumni of different academic years (from 2006 to 2011) in three major universities: Hanoi National University, Ho Chi Minh National University and Hue University. The results showed that 26.2 % of bachelors could not find a job; 46.5 % of respondents have applied for jobs in many state agencies or social organizations, but failed; 42.9 % decided to continue their education hoping to find a job in the future or choose a different profession (Than Trung Dung, 2015).

According to the Ministry of Education and Training survey on the percentage of graduates with jobs published annually, proportion of graduates from natural sciences sectors who have found a job is about 60 %, meanwhile the number of students in the social field in general and social work in particular is much lower. A recent study found that out of 100 students who just graduated from the social work sector, only 10 students were recruited into state agencies and were given the right job they were trained for, but the rest were forced to find other jobs. Therefore, the biggest problem of universities is the employment of students after graduation (Douglas Durst, 2010).

**The basic solutions to overcome difficulties in training professional social work sector at universities and colleges in Vietnam today.** The process of international integration and cooperation is taking place strongly and extensively, the university education and training system needs to have changes to improve the quality of training. Especially taking into account the fact that the social work is a new science sector, the authors have revealed five major issues that need attention and adjustment to improve the quality of this science. The Government and related ministries are implementing many synchronous solutions to manage and develop this science sector. Many plans deployed initially have had impressive results, for example: the strategic plan to develop vocational training for social workers in Vietnam in 2017–2022. Many groups of solutions have been applied across the country.

*1) A group of solutions to adjust the training program framework.* The aim is to develop and issue a new training program framework on the social work sector by the Ministry of Education and Training. This curriculum framework should be applied uniformly in the system of universities and other educational institutions training this sector across the country. The Ministry of Education and Training sets a standard of 70 % credit units of the total credits in the training program with the content and subjects suitable to the Vietnamese social context and the demand of employers of enterprises, state agencies and other social organizations. The number of remaining credits (30 %) in the training program framework will be assigned to universities and the institutions directly training self-construction and adjusted to the needs of local

employers and the strength of the training institutions. Reasonable readjustment of the number of credits between theoretical and practical training, expansion of the content of practical training for students was implemented. It is necessary to divide the number of credits between elective subjects and compulsory subjects, based on the learners' needs (Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong, 2017).

2) *A group of solutions to overcome shortages in materials, textbooks, references and electronic documents on the social work sector.* The government must have specific policies attracting many scientists and researchers to participate in the research the national projects on this science. The Ministry of Education and Training and related ministries should have attractive policies and regimes for scientists and lecturers to operate in this field. Besides that, it should regularly organize scientific conferences to exchange and share scientific publications. The universities should encourage lecturers to participate in the study of writing this specialized textbooks and curriculum at universities (Tran Xuan Binh, 2012).

3) *A group of solutions on practice and practical training for students.* The government needs to invest financial resources in the equipment, train practical instructors with enough knowledge and experience to guide students. In addition, the government should have appropriate policy mechanisms for international organizations and non-governmental organizations to participate in the development of practical training for students. Universities need to have more comprehensive and specific solutions, for example to adjust the training program framework towards increasing the number of credits for practice and practical training. In addition, universities need to have close relations with the system of the social service centres in the localities, helping students have more practice facilities outside the University for Students to develop specialized skills.

4) *A group of solutions on the lack of lecturers in universities.* Currently, this solution group has been very well addressed by the government and related ministries; not only the number of lecturers participating in training this discipline at universities increased, but also the qualification of lecturers improved. The number of lecturers with master, doctoral and professor's levels almost doubled compared to the first 5 years of the national project No. 32/2020 "On developing the quality of university lecturers", according to the survey results of Ministry of Education and Training (2018). There are also many government projects on developing teaching staffs at universities implemented with positive development signals, such as: The Project No. 911 provides scholarships for lecturers trained for the doctoral degree at home and abroad. The

Scholarship agreement between the Government of Vietnam and countries with advanced education in the world, such as Australia, England, USA, Russia and China, states that every year thousands of young lecturers will be trained abroad for many different disciplines, including the social work sector.

5) *A group of employment solutions for social work students after graduation.* The Government needs to have assessments and forecasts about the need to use the trained labour force of the society. There are reasonable orientations for vocational training to avoid a large number of graduates without jobs, which creates more burdens for the society. Universities and other training institutions need to have close contact with employers. In particular, the development of training sciences according to the needs of society and learners. Students, in addition to the knowledge and skills trained at the university, should have their own plan to research other skills to be able to fit in the current labour market.

### **Conclusion**

Training in the social work sector in Vietnam is being considered as one of the important breakthroughs for Vietnam in the period of international integration. However, social work training is also facing many major challenges, including five issues that have mentioned above. The Government and related ministries have implemented several solutions to adjust it. such as completing policy institutions, financial investment, human resources and expanding international cooperation. The universities and colleges and other training institutions are also making adjustments in the training program framework, strategic planning and training towards the needs of the labour market. With multiple synchronization of solutions being implemented, training in social work in Vietnam will meet the needs of society and will contribute to stabilizing socio-politics and developing national capacity for international integration.

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## **Основные проблемы в системе профессиональной подготовки в сфере социальной работы во Вьетнаме. Решения и перспективы развития**

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*В статье дается обзор текущих проблем обучения социальной работе во Вьетнаме. В настоящее время принимаются меры для решения основных проблем, с которыми сталкивается Вьетнам. В статье также упоминаются пять основных вопросов, которые непосредственно влияют на обучение и развитие социальной работы во Вьетнаме. Во-первых, имеются рамки программы обучения (стандартные программы обучения). Во-вторых, преподаватели в университетах занимаются подготовкой социальных работников. В-третьих, существует практика и практические занятия для студентов в университетах и колледжах Вьетнама. В-четвертых, не хватает учебников, учебных материалов и электронных материалов в сфере социальной работы. Наконец, трудоустройство студентов, прошедших профессиональную подготовку в сфере социальной работы, является большой проблемой.*

*Ключевые слова: обучение социальной работе, стандартная программа обучения, профессиональная подготовка, практические занятия, учебные материалы.*

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