

Internationalization in Social Work Education: International Days at the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Freiburg, Germany

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Introduction

A global definition of social work has been approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2014. Given the fact of globalization, the definition aims for an international understanding of core principals and goals of social work. Social work is defined as “[...] a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” [1]. Core principles and goals presented within the definition can be seen as framework to foster the professional development of social work in science and practice as well as in social work education. However, it is explicitly stated, that the definition and insofar core principles and goals may be amplified at national levels [1]. This is due to national varieties of social work e.g. regarding historical developments and scientific traditions, welfare systems and working fields or political and legal frameworks. National varieties also affect social work education e.g. regarding educational systems and their curricular emphases. In spite of potential national differences, international perspectives are highly relevant for social work education e.g. due to cross-border migration or an international orientation of social work science. To meet challenges of globalization, viewpoints on international similarities but also national differences are needed in social work education to foster the ability of future social workers to critically change perspectives through scientific thought and activity - this is, what we call internationalization. Insofar, internationalization in social work education targets the ability to take responsibility for an active contribution to the cohabitation in a globalized world.

Objectives

We consider internationalization as a comprising process of development, involving all university members of all faculties and all study courses. To consequently implement internationalization in social work education at Protestant University of applied Sciences Freiburg, we introduced two curricular interwoven approaches:

1. Incorporation of internationalization into the curriculum of social work education with the leaving certificate “International Social Work” as in-depth curricula on bachelors’ level
2. Annual “International Days” for all social work students of all semesters as cross-sectional offer to gain a basic understanding of internationalization

Objective 1

To foster internationalization in social work education we implemented an in-depth curriculum on bachelors’ level. The in-depth

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curriculum aims to qualify future social workers to be competent actors in processes of globalization and internationalization as well as transnational development. Students who accomplish the in-depth curriculum gain a certificate “International Social Work” supplementary to their bachelors’ degree. Therefore, students have to complete a practical or theoretical semester abroad and acquire at least 20 creditpoints in lectures licensed for the in-depth curriculum. Contentual core elements of these lectures are e.g. international social work theories and international welfare systems as well as international development cooperation. Furthermore, transnational perspectives regarding e.g. migration or racism are developed. To enhance the ability to work in diverse cultural and societal contexts, these contents are supplemented by the acquisition of intercultural competencies. Additionally, students have to incur tutoring for incoming students of extern universities. The in-depth curriculum is completed by a two-semester course in a foreign language [2]. Every year about 20 students can be inscribed for the in-depth curriculum, which is about 20% of social work students of one vintage.

Objective 2

As mentioned above, only a share of one vintage can be inscribed for the in-depth curriculum. To implement internationalization related content on a broader level in social work education, we implemented annually “International Days” for all students of all cohorts and of all faculties on bachelors’ as well as masters’ level. Subsequently, we just report about those parts of the “International Days” targeting on students of the faculty for social work. The “International Days” take place once a year since 2018. For conducting the “International Days” we invite international acknowledged experts and combine different contentual and didactic elements. Hereinafter, those elements are exemplary described along the “International Days” 2019.

The “International Days” are opened by a central keynote-speech for all students of all cohorts on bachelors’ and masters’ level. The

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keynote-speech is held by an international recognized expert and evolves the frame topic. In 2019 the keynote-speech “Exploring trans-national connections from an intersectional perspective” (Prof. Dr. Helma Lutz, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany) analyzed interrelations between migration, gender relations as well as working conditions against the background of transnational linkages.

To deepen the issues addressed by the keynote-speech, second- and third-year bachelor students afterwards discuss the topics’ significance for social work regarding their curricular chosen field of action modules within workshops. In 2019 the benefit of an intersectional analyses’ perspective was discussed regarding power relations and discrimination e.g. in youth welfare or socio spatial social work.

Additionally, further workshops with international experts take place in the field of action modules for advanced bachelor students addressing international and transnational topics specific to the particular field of action. 2019 topics were “Mental health and poverty” (Prof. Dr. Sabine Bährer-Kohler, IFSW representative at the WHO, Switzerland), “Migration society” (Prof. Dr. Helma Lutz, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany), “Drug use, risk behaviour and delinquency” (Dr. Johann Nordgren, Malmö University, Sweden), “Behavioural problems in children and adolescents, support and assistance for people with disabilities” (Prof. Dr. Ana Isabel Salgado, Escola Superior de Educação de Paula Frassinetti Porto, Portugal), “Social work with trauma survivors” (Prof. Dr. Waleria Stelmaszuk, University of Warsaw, Poland), “Social gerontology” (Prof. Dr. İlhan Tomanbay, İstinye University, Istanbul) and “Social work with adolescents” (Ulrike Wisser, European Committee of the AGJ, Belgium).

The second day is particularly addressed to first-year bachelor students and is again opened by a keynote-speech referring on social work theory and development. In 2019 the keynote-speech “Social work in Europe, history and future” (Prof. Dr. Waleria Stelmaszuk, University of Warsaw, Poland) evinced different historical development lines in eastern and western Europe and analyzed them regarding their impact on actual understanding and provision of social work. Afterwards, an in-depth examination of the lecture and the related discussion took place in workshops on social work theory.

To gain further insights in social work science, practice and education in different countries, every first-year bachelor student was invited to join two country-workshops. In 2019, workshops were provided regarding social work in Belgium (Ulrike Wisser, European Committee of the AGJ, Belgium), France (Dr. Bruno Michon, ESEIS University Strasbourg, France), Poland (Prof. Dr. Waleria Stelmaszuk, University of Warsaw, Poland), Switzerland (Prof. Dr. Sabine Bährer-Kohler, IFSW representative at the WHO, Switzerland), Sweden (Dr. Johann Nordgren, Malmö University, Sweden), Czech Republic (Dr. Eva Křížová, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic) and Turkey (Prof. Dr. İlhan Tomanbay, İstinye University, Istanbul).

The third day is especially addressed to master students and refers on diagnosis of a changing society. In 2019 a lecture “EU-funding of non-profit organizations” (Prof. Dr. Brigitta Zierer, FH Campus Vienna, Austria) was held.

Except the keynote-speeches, all offers within the “International Days” were held in team-teaching by the international guests and lecturers of the Protestant University of applied Sciences Freiburg.

The full program - also including the program for the other participating faculties - can be found at [3].

Conclusion

Internationalization is a central task in social work education. Aside of national varieties, it gives future social workers the opportunity to develop professional knowledge and attitudes necessary to act competent in an interwoven globalized world. In addition to our in-depth curriculum related to internationalization, our “International Days” give students the opportunity to experience contradictory theoretical positions to promote their professional development and hereby an advancement of quality in social work. Additionally, our “International Days” lead to an intensive exchange between local lecturers and international guests and thus to pathways to joint publications or research cooperation.

Authors’ Contributions

FF served as team-teacher at the “International Days” and wrote the paper. BS was centrally involved in developing the in-depth curriculum leading to the certificate “International Social Work” and is main organizer of the “International Days”. Both authors revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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2. Protestant University of applied Sciences Freiburg (2019) International Profile.
3. Protestant University of applied Sciences Freiburg (2019) Program of the International Days 2019.