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EMPLOYER EVALUATION OF SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES' JOB PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM A PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This research studied how employers assess job performance of Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) Bachelor-degree graduates of the Kalinga State University (KSU) Batch 2022-2023 as a way of presenting evidence about curriculum improvement and enhance alignment between higher education training and professional social work practice. In particular, it evaluated the satisfaction of employers, the strengths, and weaknesses of graduates, as well as identified essential job characteristics needed at the workplace. A quantitative descriptive design was adopted with a validated employer feedback questionnaire that was sent to 20 employers who were agency heads, immediate supervisors and human resource officers directly supervising the graduates. The results indicated that overall $M = 4.20$ employers were relatively very satisfied with the performance of graduates. Credibility ($M = 4.31$) also scored the highest, then collaboration/caring ($M = 4.27$) which reflected good ethical integrity, trustworthiness, empathy and teamwork. Receiving high ratings was also commitment ($M = 4.15$) and the lowest average was given to competence ($M = 4.07$), which indicates some relative differences in applied technical skills, decision-making, and problem-solving. Communication skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork and adaptiveness were among strengths of graduates identified by employers. Nevertheless, time and task management, the confidence of the leadership, emotional regulation, and digital literacy were cited as weaknesses and areas that need to be demonstrated. Employers also pointed out professionalism, work ethic, integrity, interpersonal skills and work efficiency as important employability characteristics in the social work practice. On the whole, the findings show that graduates have excellent ethical and interpersonal skills, but still need more training in applied and digital skills. The paper highlights the necessity of curriculum renewal in terms of reinforced experiential education, enhancement of professional leadership and integrating technology to guarantee context-specificity to changing needs in the labor market, especially in post-pandemic, digitally mediated workplaces.

KEYWORDS: Employer Evaluation; Social Work Graduates; Job Performance; Employer Satisfaction; Graduate Employability.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing emphasis on graduate employability has reshaped how higher education institutions (HEIs) evaluate the effectiveness of their academic programs, particularly in professionally oriented disciplines such as social work. In contemporary higher education discourse, the value of a degree is no longer measured solely by academic achievement but by the extent to which graduates can perform competently in real-world settings. This shift is closely aligned with outcomes-based education (OBE), which requires institutions to demonstrate that learning outcomes translate into workplace readiness. In the field of social work, this expectation is especially critical, given the profession's direct engagement with complex social issues such as poverty, inequality, and community vulnerability. As such, employer evaluations of graduates have emerged as a vital source of evidence for assessing whether higher education is fulfilling its mandate to produce competent, practice-ready professionals (Jackson, 2020; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

Ideally, social work education should produce graduates who possess a balanced combination of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, ethical grounding, and professional dispositions. Competency frameworks and accreditation standards emphasize the development of critical thinking, communication, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making, alongside technical skills required for effective service delivery (Bogo et al., 2022). In practice, however, there is growing concern that graduates, while strong in interpersonal and value-based competencies, may lack the applied, analytical, and technical skills necessary for complex workplace environments. Studies across different contexts suggest that employers often perceive a gap between what graduates know and what they are able to do in professional settings (Hora et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). This disconnect raises important questions about the alignment between academic preparation and labor market expectations.

Previous research has attempted to address this issue by examining graduate employability and competency development. For instance, Succi and Canovi (2020) highlight the increasing importance of soft skills, such as teamwork and adaptability, in shaping employability outcomes. Similarly, Tymon et al. (2021) report that employers generally express satisfaction with graduates' interpersonal and professional behaviors. In the context of social work, studies have consistently identified strengths in communication, empathy, and ethical practice, often

attributed to the emphasis on field education and reflective learning (Beddoe et al., 2021; Cleak & Zuchowski, 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights, they also reveal important limitations. Much of the existing literature relies on generalized employability frameworks or internal academic assessments, rather than direct employer evaluations within specific institutional contexts. Moreover, there is limited integration of multiple dimensions of performance—such as satisfaction levels, strengths and weaknesses, and desired job traits—within a single analytical framework.

The persistence of this gap has both direct and indirect consequences. At the individual level, graduates may experience difficulties in transitioning to professional roles, affecting their confidence, job performance, and career progression. At the organizational level, employers may incur additional costs in training and supervision to address competency deficiencies. More broadly, the mismatch between education and practice can undermine the effectiveness of social work services, particularly in contexts where resources are limited and the demand for competent professionals is high. These challenges are further compounded in developing countries, where social workers operate in complex socio-cultural environments that require not only technical expertise but also adaptability and contextual sensitivity (Cai, 2021; Pham & Jackson, 2020).

Despite the growing body of literature on graduate employability, there remains a notable lack of context-specific research that captures employer perspectives in the Philippine setting. Existing studies tend to focus on global or Western contexts, which may not fully reflect the realities of social work practice in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, while previous research has identified general competency gaps, there is limited empirical evidence on how these gaps manifest in actual job performance as evaluated by employers. This indicates a critical gap in knowledge: the need for a comprehensive, employer-based assessment of social work graduates that integrates multiple dimensions of performance and is grounded in a specific institutional and cultural context.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining employer evaluations of social work graduates from a Philippine higher education institution. Specifically, it aims to assess employer satisfaction, identify graduates' strengths and weaknesses, and determine the key job traits valued in professional practice. In doing so, the study builds on existing literature by moving beyond generalized

employability discussions toward a more nuanced and contextually grounded analysis of graduate performance. It adopts an outcomes-based perspective, informed by competency-based frameworks and the broader discourse on employability, to evaluate how well academic preparation aligns with workplace expectations.

This study is academic and practical as it supports the theory and practice respectively that emphasizes empirical evidence regarding the viewpoint of employers. It broadens the existing concept of graduate employability in the social work domain by focusing on interplay of interpersonal, technical, and emerging competencies, including digital literacy and emotional regulation. Simultaneously, it provides useful implications on the curriculum development, quality control, and the institutional policy, which can facilitate the attempts to enhance the correspondence between social work education and professional practice in the Philippine context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment of the employment performance of graduates based on the input of their employers has emerged as a key component of measuring the job quality and relevance of higher education, especially in professionally focused courses like social work. As an aspect of outcomes-based education (OBE), the expectations of institutions of higher education (HEIs) include the demonstration of competences of graduates in relation to the requirements of labor markets. This congruency is particularly pertinent in social work, in which practitioners become involved in the multidimensional and combination social problems. In turn, employer ratings can be characterized as an extrinsic and work-based measure of the efficacy of academic preparation in turning into workplace performance.

Five recent publications in high-impact journals indicate the increasingly significant role of the employer feedback in assessing the graduate employability. Succi and Canovi (2020) point out that employers are turning more and more attention to transversal competencies (communication, teamwork, problem-solving) instead of knowledge in specific disciplines. The change can be interpreted as the broader adjustments to labor market demands in which flexibilities and interpersonal skills are crucial (Clarke, 2020; Tomlinson, 2021). On the same note, Jackson (2020) highlights that employability is defined by the incorporation of academic knowledge with work-integrated lessons, with employers with low emphasis on theoretical knowledge but rather practical skills. The conclusions are supported by

those offered by Pang et al. (2020), who show that soft skills and behavioral attributes are the determinants of workplace success that are always valued by employers.

Although the importance of employer feedback has been identified, literature shows that there have been continuous difficulties in using it. According to Tymon et al. (2021), employers say that they are typically highly satisfied with the level of interpersonal and professional competencies that graduates have, yet there are no standardized frameworks to assess the specified attributes. In addition, Hora et al. (2020) state that in many instances, employer expectations tend to be dynamic and context-specific, resulting in inability of HEIs to synchronize the curricula to meet the demands of the workplace. This is made more difficult by the fact that the connection between higher education and industry according to Pham and Jackson (2020) is loose implying that the outputs of the institutions are not necessarily directly related to the needs of the labor markets.

In the sphere of social work, the recent research has been emphasizing the idea of interpersonal and ethical competences as the main assets of graduates. According to Bogdan et al. (2022), the professional values-based orientation of social work indicates that social work graduates are highly competent regarding client engagement skills, ethical decision making, and communication. In a similar vein, Cleak and Zuchowski (2020) discuss the relevance of supervision and reflective practice to the building of emotional intelligence and professional judgment. Beddoe et al. (2021) go on to suggest that the composition of professional identity in the social work field has a strong connection to such concepts as empathy, ethical awareness, and service commitment.

The evidence of such findings is proved in the studies of experiential learning which emphasizes the importance of field education as the means of professional competence formation. Caspersen and Smeby (2021) discovered that placement training leads to significant positive effects in the learning outcomes of students and their adequacy to face reality in the workplace. Similarly, Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) note that structured work-integrated learning experiences are one of the best strategies that enhance graduate employability. Nevertheless, these studies point out the strengths of social work education in addition to limitations. A lot of the data has been done on field supervisor ratings or student self-reports, not direct employer ratings, and so the question arises as to how much these

competencies are being maintained in real-life work situations.

In fact, there is a common theme in the literature regarding absence of competency gaps in the graduates. According to Trede et al. (2020), there is a gap between theoretical knowledge in schools and real practice in the workplace as most graduates cannot successfully translate theoretical learning into application due to the complexity and ambiguity of the workplace. Likewise, Hora et al. (2020) find a lack of problem-solving and critical thinking, where a graduate is supposed to be able to make contextually informed decisions using uncertainty to navigate. Nguyen et al. (2021) also find that the discrepancy in the skills of graduates and workforce requirements is not completely tackled by higher education reforms.

Along with technical and analytical, new competencies like digital literacy and leadership are also gaining prominence as a requirement to practice.

According to Succi and Canovi (2020), such important attributes of employability include digital and entrepreneurial skills, but Cai (2021) emphasizes the role of transferring knowledge between higher education and industry in shaping these skills. Nevertheless, they still lack in the development of many academic programs, including social work, which indicates an existing disparity between educational delivery and the changing work requirements.

The problem of emotional control and strength is another key challenge that is observed in the recent literature. Although empathy and emotional engagement are the defining strengths of people in the role of a social worker, they may lead to stress and burnout as well. Beddoe et al. (2021) underline that the competencies of resilience and self-care are crucial to the continued effectiveness of professionals, which are, however, not sufficiently covered in official curricula. This is consistent with other broader results in the area of employability, that highlight the significance of psychological resources and career adaptability (Donald et al., 2021; Donald et al., 2022).

By considering the employer expectation, the recent research offers a thorough insight on the qualities that are appreciated among graduates. According to Tymon et al. (2021), the degree of professionalism, reliability, and work ethic are the primary factors that influence employer satisfaction. On the same note, adaptability, lifelong learning, career self-management, are essential skills Jackson (2021) identifies in the dynamic work setting. These results align with the work of Pinto and Ramalheira (2021), who find out that not only the academic

performance but also the behavioral and experience-based factors also influence employability.

Nevertheless, a discrepancy between these expectations and existing educational practices also has been found in the literature. Although competency frameworks offer broad guidelines, they are not usually specific and they do not take into consideration variations in practice settings (Cai, 2021). It is especially important in developing situations, as the practice of social work is pre-determined by specific socio-cultural and economic factors. Wang et al. (2026) go on to note that employability is a multi-interactive factor that is affected by institutional support, individual abilities and labor market conditions which indicates that a more integrated graduate preparation method should be implemented.

Critical review of the literature shows that a number of the patterns are important. To begin with, it is agreeable that the graduates of social work are strong interpersonally and ethically, which depicts the fundamental values of the profession. Second, gaps in technical, analytical and leadership competencies are regularly observed, which means that more balanced, practice-based training is required. Third, although employer feedback has been identified as valuable, it is not always utilized in curriculum development. Numerous research points to lack of competencies but fails to analyse the implementation of such knowledge into curriculum reforms.

Contradictions are also evident. Employer satisfaction is high with competency gaps in place implying that the level of satisfaction is not entirely reflecting the nature of job performance. Also, although work-integrated learning is popularly advocated as an answer to the problem of employability, the empirical data about the role of particular types of experiential learning in enhancing long-term professional competence are scarce (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021).

The existing literature is insightful on a wide range of the weaknesses and strengths of social work education, but is uneven in its presence and position. It is evident that a research which incorporates various dimensions of employer assessment like job satisfaction, strengths and weaknesses, and preferred job characteristics in one analytical framework is required. Moreover, the research in the case of developing countries especially in Southeast Asia is scanty.

The current research fills these gaps by offering an in-depth and context-bound analysis of employer reviews of social work graduates of a Philippine

higher education institution. The study enhances a comprehensive picture of graduate performance by referring to satisfaction levels among employers, defining the areas of strengths and weaknesses, and defining the most important job characteristics. Furthermore, it expands the body of literature with new emerging competencies like digital literacy, emotional regulation and leadership, thus providing both theoretical and practical implications of the curriculum change and quality assurance in social work education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The presented study is rooted in Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework that argues that graduate employability depends on the synthesis of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that develop a successful performance in the workplace. In this context, competency is not only cognitive achievement but also behavioral, ethical, and functional in the actual life context. The research is also informed by the graduate employability theory, specifically the OECD and ILO models, which underscore the notion that contemporary workforce preparativeness demands a combination of technical and digital literacy, interpersonal and adaptive competence. Such frameworks demonstrate that employer assessments will serve as a very important indicator of effectiveness in education, especially in practice-based field like social work. Combined, these viewpoints offer an interpretation of employer feedback as an indicator of workplace readiness and curriculum alignment, as opposed to mere performance rating. The selected four performance areas of competence, commitment, collaboration/caring, and credibility are determined through accepted social work competency levels, as well as global employability models. Competence demonstrates in practice applied knowledge, technical skills, and decisional ability. • Dedication to work is the promise of dedication, responsibility, and professional involvement. • Collaboration/Caring embodies interpersonal effectiveness, empathy, and teamwork, which are focal in social work practice. Credibility indicates turbidity of integrity, responsibility, and professional credibility. These field areas intersect with international models of competencies like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) models, which focus on ethical behavior, relational practice, and applied competence in practice as fundamental features of social work practitioners.

METHODS

Research Design

In this research, the descriptive quantitative research design was used to methodically evaluate the opinions of employers towards the performance of Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) graduates in the workplace. The study is appropriate in its design because it is going to allow objective measurement and description of the employer evaluations without manipulating any variables. It offers a systematic way of getting representation of actual performance of graduates on key competency areas.

Data Sources

Primary data were collected directly with employers who directly supervised BSSW graduates Batch 20222023. The research was done in Kalinga State University, Dagupan Campus, Tabuk City, Kalinga, Philippines. A structured employer feedback questionnaire, modified through Ocay et al. (2024), on employer satisfaction and perceptions of graduate performance was used to collect the data. Sampling Purposive sampling method was used to make sure that only the qualified informants with first hand experience of direct supervision were included. No less than 20 employer-respondents took part in the study, which included agency heads (40%), immediate supervisors (45%), and human resource officers (15%). This composition has guaranteed that the feedback had a plurality of organizational levels of control.

Variables / Data Processing

In the study, the authors investigated whether employers are satisfied with the performance of graduates in four fundamental areas: competence, commitment, collaboration/caring, and credibility. Besides that, qualitative measures like perceived strengths, weaknesses, and desired job characteristics of graduates were recorded. Respondent was asked to respond with a reason scale comprising of five points based on the level of their satisfaction, i.e., 1 (Not Satisfied) to 5 (Very Much Satisfied). This tool was professionally tested with three field instructional overseers with a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.92. A pilot test was conducted which yielded a Cronbachs Alpha of 0.86 or very high internal consistency. Finished questionnaires were verified on their completeness, encoded and ready to be subjected to statistical analysis.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical data analysis methods were employed, in the form of frequencies, weighted averages, and ranking. The degree of employer satisfaction with the four domains of performance was calculated using

weighted means, and frequency and ranking were determined as the most common strengths of graduates and desired job characteristics as well as weaknesses. Findings were read according to those relativities of the Likert scale descriptive equivalents to give a sense of meaningful interpretation of the employers appraisals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Employers' Satisfaction with Graduate Performance

Table 1. Employer Satisfaction with BSSW Graduates' Performance

Performance Domain	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Competence	4.07	Satisfied
Commitment	4.15	Much Satisfied
Collaboration/Caring	4.27	Much Satisfied
Credibility	4.31	Very Much Satisfied
Overall Mean	4.20	Much Satisfied

Table 1. Employer Satisfaction with BSSW Graduates Across Performance Domains

Performance Domain	Weighted Mean (M)	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Credibility	4.31	Very Much Satisfied	1
Collaboration/Caring	4.27	Much Satisfied	2
Commitment	4.15	Much Satisfied	3
Competence	4.07	Satisfied	4
Overall Mean	4.20	Much Satisfied	—

The comprehensive degree of employer satisfaction ($M = 4.20$) shows that BSSW graduates are viewed as being extremely competent within the work setting which is representative of a high proficiency with college preparation and the expectations of the field. The outcome is that graduates are sufficiently prepared to engage in social work as professionals, especially concerning moral behavior and human interaction. Credibility got the best mean ($M = 4.31$) which means that employers have high expectations of integrity, accountability and ethical conduct of the graduates when delivering services. This conclusion supports the current literature that discussed that trustworthiness and ethical practice are key pillars of social work employability (Cuevas, 2017; Gonzales and Reyes, 2018). Likewise, the Collaboration /

Caring ($M = 4.27$) shows a high level of relational competence, teamwork, and empathy, which are the essential professional qualities within human service professional fields. The findings are in line with previous findings that social work training in the Philippine context is successful in cultivating the interpersonal sensitivity and the client-focus in the encounter. The lowest mean ($M = 4.07$) was likewise noted in Competence, even though it falls within Signed Range, which is Satisfied as well. This implies relative disparities in operational technical capabilities like documentation preciseness, on-field determination making and the analytical use of the social work procedures. This is in line with the previous results showing a continued gap between theory and practice in social work education (Gonzales and Reyes, 2018).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Graduate

Table 2. Employer-Identified Strengths of BSSW Graduates

Rank	Strengths	Thematic Interpretation
1	Communication Skills	Clear expression & reporting
2	Emotional Intelligence	Empathy & client sensitivity
3	Teamwork/Collaboration	Cooperative field engagement
4	Adaptability	Flexibility in work settings

Communication skills and emotional intelligence were the most notable strengths of graduates highlighted by employers all the time. This means that the graduates excel in specifically interpersonal interaction, working with clients and teamwork in the

field. These competencies play a critical role in the social work practice, where the dynamics of relations have a major impact on the outcome of service delivery. The ability to empathize, listen, and be sensitive to vulnerable populations is a strength of the graduates as

shown by the presence of emotional intelligence. This is in line with what Balangue (2015) emphasized that effectiveness of social work in communities is characterized by relational competence of social workers. Also, flexibility and collaboration imply that

graduates can operate within a changing and resource-restricted setting; this is a highly necessary demand in the Philippine social welfare realms. Overall, these advantages demonstrate a solid grounding in soft skills and human-centered practice.

Table 3. Employer-Identified Weaknesses of BSSW Graduates

Rank	Weaknesses	Thematic Interpretation
1	Time & Task Management	Workflow inefficiency
2	Leadership Confidence	Limited supervisory readiness
3	Emotional Regulation	Stress response challenges
4	Digital Literacy	Limited tech integration skills

Although the interpersonal competencies were very high, the employers also found significant problems in terms of time management and task management, that is, they showed inability to have give preference to the workload and fulfill administrative timelines. This is indicative of a common issue in practice based professions whereby the demands of the field present the necessity of fulfilling several roles at the same time.

Leadership confidence weak areas indicate a poor preparation towards the supervisory position or they are not prepared to work as case coordinators. Equally, emotional regulation problems and burnout

are signs of susceptibility to stress that can be especially applicable to high-demand social welfare settings. This is aligned with De Jesus (2019) who observed that emotional fatigue and role overload are some of the challenges prevalent among social workers in their early careers.

Digital literacy has been included as a weakness, especially in modern practice which is more and more digital in documentation of cases, reporting systems and data management. This disparity indicates the necessity of curricular improvement in social work practice that involves technology.

Job Traits Sought by Employers

Table 4. Desired Job Traits for Social Work Recruits

Rank	Job Traits	Professional Significance
1	Professionalism & Work Ethic	Reliability and accountability
2	Time & Task Management	Efficiency in service delivery
3	Interpersonal Skills	Client and team engagement
4	Integrity	Ethical decision-making
5	Adaptability	Flexibility in field conditions
6	Critical Thinking	Analytical decision-making
7	Communication Skills	Reporting and coordination

Professionalism and the concept of work ethic had been mentioned by the employers as the most desired characteristics, and the essential role of reliability, responsibility, and uniformity in the service delivery. This underlines the fact that social work graduates should be able to exhibit not only technical proficient but also highly moral and professionally grounded individuals.

The significance of time and task management and interpersonal skills is also a consequence of the features of the operational demands of social work practice: in this case, the efficiency and communication with the human person are equally important.

In the meantime, such aspects of the profession as integrity and critical thinking emphasize ethical and analytical aspects of the profession. This is in accordance with the arguments by Valerio and Maglaya (2020), who posit that employability in the

social work is largely becoming characterized by a combination of ethical integrity, cognitive competence, and adaptive interpersonal skills. On the whole, employers are demanding whole practitioners that can combine technical, ethical, and relational skills in the field.

FINDINGS

The results indicate that there is an ordered performance gradient in domains, with ethical and relational competencies performing well above applied technical competence. This trend indicates that the BSSW programme is more efficient in nurturing affective and interpersonal levels as opposed to nurturing the high-level applied skills and decision-making potential.

In terms of competency based education, this imbalance means a partial achievement of employability results. Although credibility and

collaboration are good signs of excellent professional socialization, the relatively low competence score is a good indication of both a gap in theory-to-practice transfer where the value of the graduated with theory may not be practical in the complex world of the field.

This observation concurs with the evidence in the literature on social work education worldwide, which indicates that upon graduation, most of them exhibit highly rated values-driven practice and need additional training in decision-making using data, documentation of cases, and service delivery using technology.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to analyse the employer review on the job performance of Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) students of the Kalinga State University (KSU), Batch 2022-2023. Particularly, it was aimed at measuring the level of the employer satisfaction, strengths and weaknesses of the graduates, and the job characteristics that are highly rated by the employers. The results were supposed to create a contribution of the empirical evidence to the improvement of the curriculum and to reinforce the connection between the social work education and the professional practice in the environment of the Philippine higher education.

According to the answers of 20 participant employers the findings of the survey organization are that the employers are generally much satisfied ($M = 4.20$) with the performance of the BSSW graduates. Of the four domains measured, Credibility ($M = 4.31$) was the top followed by Collaboration/Caring ($M = 4.27$), which demonstrated great moral composition, trustworthiness, compassion, and cooperation. Positive ratings were also received in the area of commitment ($M = 4.15$), which implies that the responsibility and engagement in the tasks are sufficient, whereas the Competence ($M = 4.07$) got the lowest average score, which is related to the relative deficits in used technical skills, analytical decision-making, and field-based problem-solving. Employers also ranked the skills of communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and adaptability as the strongest, while the time and tasks handling, confidence in leadership, emotional control, and digital literacy were ranked as the weakest ones. As far as work demands are concerned, employability necessities, professionalism, hardworking, integrity and human relationships were highlighted as necessary job qualities.

The implications of the findings on the theory, organization management, and policy at the workplace are vital. Theoretically, the findings support a competency-based and practice-oriented education approach that emphasizes the combination of ethical and interpersonal and technical aspects as a core of graduate employability. Credibility and collaboration are the two dominating factors that deter the point of the continuing relevance of relational and ethical frameworks in the social work practice. Organizational-wise, the findings imply that the school and employer should be more closely working together to refine field instruction, supervision, and skills training. At the policy level, they emphasize the significance of curriculum responsiveness to the changing needs in the labor market, especially in enhancing applied competence and digital literacy in social work education.

The relevance of these findings becomes even more important in the professional landscape after the pandemic, when the delivery of social services becomes more mediated by technology, and its management becomes more convoluted. The combination of the detected deficiencies in digital literacy and task management implies that adaptive training initiatives, which combine the application of technologies, remote organization, and efficiency-based workflows, should be realized. The National results are consistent with international shifts in the broader workforce that have focused on the convergence of soft skills and digital capabilities in human service roles that are facing modernization and digital transformation.

The relatively small and institution-specific sample, which is employed in the study, however, holds the research back since it can limit the generalizability. Moreover, performance appraisal could be biased by depending on self-reports by the employer. In future research, the limitations can be overcome by increasing the sample to cover a range of higher education institutions, using mixed-method approaches, and utilize viewpoints of clients and graduates themselves to offer a more complex evaluation framework.

These issues have profound curriculum redesign, field instruction, and institutional policy implications. Colleges need to transform to competency-based curricula that maintain ethical-social-formation and applied skills of digital and analytical proficiency. This involves enhancing the simulation learning, the incorporation of a digital case management tool, and the exposure to the field in complicated social services settings.

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