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Psychological and pedagogical features of training future social service workers

Características psicológicas y pedagógicas de la formación de los futuros trabajadores de los servicios sociales

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Abstract

The system of training future workers of social services is being transformed in connection with a number of challenges in the social-economic sphere, significantly differentiating within the EU countries. The purpose of the academic paper lies in analysing psychological and pedagogical features in the educational training of social service specialists using the example of EU countries. Methodology. A qualitative design based

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on a content analysis of the legal framework, statistical data and analytical reports posted on the website of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (2022) have been used in the present research. The results show that social work as an educational training program includes three educational levels: bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies. In general, in the EU countries, general requirements regarding the structure and content of educational programs are determined, which are established by legislation. Educational programs are built on a competency-based approach, which involves the formation of professional skills of specialists. Educational institutions specializing in the training of social workers are also experience changes in curricula in accordance with changes in social practice and European education standards, the growing role of practical experience, internships, and research projects. The training programs use the competency-based approach to overcome social problems and changes in social security systems.

Keywords: social work, social work, social protection, training of social workers, social security.

Resumen

El sistema de formación de los futuros trabajadores de los servicios sociales se está transformando en relación con una serie de retos en el ámbito socioeconómico, diferenciando significativamente dentro de los países de la UE. El propósito del trabajo académico radica en analizar las características psicológicas y pedagógicas en la formación educativa de los especialistas en servicios sociales utilizando el ejemplo de los países de la UE. Metodología. En la presente investigación se ha utilizado un diseño cualitativo basado en un análisis de contenido del marco legal, datos estadísticos e informes analíticos publicados en el sitio web de la Asociación Europea de Escuelas de Trabajo Social (2022). Los resultados muestran que el trabajo social como programa de formación educativa comprende tres niveles educativos: licenciatura, maestría y doctorado. En general, en los países de la UE se determinan requisitos generales en cuanto a la estructura y contenido de los programas educativos, los cuales son establecidos por la legislación. Los programas educativos se construyen sobre un enfoque basado en competencias, lo que implica la formación de habilidades profesionales de especialistas. Las instituciones educativas especializadas en la formación de trabajadores sociales también están experimentando cambios en los planes de estudio de acuerdo con los cambios en la práctica social y los estándares educativos europeos, el papel cada vez mayor de la experiencia práctica, las pasantías y los proyectos de investigación. Los programas de formación utilizan el enfoque basado en competencias para superar problemas sociales y cambios en los sistemas de seguridad social.

Palabras clave: trabajo social, trabajo social, protección social, formación de trabajadores sociales, seguridad social.

1. Introduction

The system of training future workers of social services is being transformed in connection with a number of challenges in the social-economic sphere, significantly differentiating within the EU countries. The migration and demographic crises in Europe, the growth of youth unemployment, gender inequality, and the digitalization of labour markets have led to the need to revise the educational system of training. In a number of the most developed countries (Germany, Italy, France), the competency-based approach to training has been implemented to train specialists capable of solving complex problems regardless of the subsystem of the social sphere. Social work as a field of training involves a combination of different disciplinary paradigms, which accordingly requires a review of the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the training of specialists. "Social work is both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, and draws on a wide array of scientific theories and research" (European Association of Schools of Social Work, 2022). Social work is based not only on theoretical fundamentals and studies, which are in constant development, but also on theories from other humanitarian sciences, in particular, pedagogy and psychology, social pedagogy. More and more attention is paid to empirical investigations and research projects in the education of specialists. Teaching and learning requires social work educators to use pedagogical approaches that ensure a thorough understanding of real-life scenarios (Addo Koers & Timpson, 2022). Taking into account the indicated changes in the training of specialists, it is relevant to study the features of psychological and pedagogical conditions in the educational training of social service specialists.

The purpose of the academic paper lies in analysing psychological and pedagogical features in the educational training of social service specialists using the example of EU countries.

2. Literature Review

The expansion of educational programs of social work and social services in higher education in Europe had been taking place taking into account social-economic problems and a high level of social cohesion (Lyons, 1999). The economic growth of the EU countries contributed to full employment, and as a result, access to social security systems and protection against such risks as illness, old age, disability, etc. However, the emergence of new challenges in the social sphere led to the expansion of socially vulnerable sections of the population. As a result, educational training programs that were targeted at certain population groups required transformations (Campanini & Frost, 2004). Several changes have taken place in education over the past decades due to declining levels of social cohesion in many European countries (Laparra & Pérez-Eransus, 2012). The training of social services workers has been affected by such changes as the transformation of labour markets, the quality of employment, new labour models in connection with digitalization during the transition to a global economy (Opačić & Žganec, 2021; Vilka & Lotko, 2021). As a result, people, employed in various spheres of the economy, became less protected, the level of access to social security decreased, which

especially affects young people, migrants, and vulnerable segments of the population (Foessa, 2019). The high level of unemployment and instability of employment have given rise to an increase in the demand for social services from people without income. The emergence of new types of families without the possibility of providing care to vulnerable segments of the population, the aging of the population, the growing number of elderly people requires changes in the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the training of social service specialists (Martínez-Virto & Pérez-Eransus, 2018). The basic tendencies that influenced the training of social workers were as follows: an increase in demand for social services, budget adjustments and new functions in the management of the social security system, causing the weakening of the model of social assistance, which functioned on the basis of individual case management (Martínez-Virto & Sánchez-Salmerón, 2019). The modern approach to social assistance involves a rapid professional response with a strong bureaucratic component to control limited financial resources, reflecting the new model of social security (Kloppenburg & Hendriks, 2021; Lazăr, 2021). Therefore, the conditions for the training of specialists, focused on their competence (knowledge, abilities, skills), are changing (Garrett & Bertotti, 2016; Ioakimidis, Santos & Herrero, 2014; Karagkounis, 2016). The EU countries have been faced with a fundamental task of political and social reconstruction of the education system, in the context of which the competence of social workers is of central importance. This is due to the fact that knowledge, abilities and skills combine a universal scientific basis and the possibility of their adaptation to specific social contexts and problems. Education in the field of social work should use the diverse experience of EU countries in solving social issues in order to create future-oriented educational programs (Lorenz, 2021).

3. Methodology

A qualitative design based on a content analysis of the legal framework, statistical data and analytical reports posted on the website of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (2022) have been used in the present research. In order to assess the psychological and pedagogical features in the educational training of social service specialists on the example of the EU countries, the following countries were selected, namely: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and Cyprus. Various social-economic prerequisites, the structure of labour markets and models of social security systems were the main criteria for choosing these countries for the purpose of analysing the training systems of social service specialists.

4. Results

In Finland, social work is an independent discipline in the system of training of specialists in social services. Students study this discipline at the university on the basis of an integrated research model. The study model is developed within the concept of a socially oriented state (that is, a state that focuses on the welfare of citizens). Scientific disciplines within the limits of social work include three levels of education: bachelor, master and doctor of social sciences. Only those students who underwent training for five years at

the university can submit an application for the position of professional social worker and received a bachelor's degree in Finland in Finland (Lähteinen et al., 2017). In general, Finland is one of the leading countries in the development of the system of training of social service specialists. Social workers play a key role in the social service delivery system, often working in a highly professional environment that includes, for example, psychologists, medical practitioners, primary school teachers, early childhood nurses with practice and labour market service experts, rehabilitation experts. In Finland, many positions of practicing social workers remain free, despite the high level of educated students in the country.

In Finland, among the main problems of social workers, bureaucracy in the management system and a high level of workload. Therefore, social workers cannot concentrate on systematic preventive work. In Finland's training, emphasis is on research that study the problems of social work in the country. Such broad multidisciplinary contextualization, particularly in the social and behavioural sciences, typically limits curricula.

The system of higher education in social work in Finland includes two parallel systems of educational institutions: polytechnics and universities. The education system clearly distinguishes the goals of these types of educational institutions. Each establishment owns its own learning profile. Education at universities includes research and the actual training program for specialists who are closely related. The main task of the two types of educational institutions is to conduct research and use their results in work and education. Polytechnics are interdisciplinary institutions of higher education, which are focused on the development of practical relations with the labour market, regional development, solving social problems in the regions. Over the past ten years, thanks to the state investment, the number of students who are studying in specialties in social work at six universities in Finland has increased rapidly. At the same time, the number of students who are enrolled in the programs of learning on social sciences are reduced. In a year, about 350 new students are credited to the training programs for social work, which have the right to get a bachelor's degree. Due to the large number of applicants and the popularity of social work, applicants undergo a complex process of entrance exams. Nevertheless, this also partially ensures the low level of screening and motivation of students.

Most of the graduates are satisfied with the education environment, the content and quality of study, as well as the level of research. Almost all the students enrolled receive a bachelor or master degree. About 340 graduates annually receive an application for work in social services. The next feature of the education system in the field of Finland's social work provides for the autonomy of the country's universities. Educational institutions in this way can determine the content of the training program and coordinate them with the requirements of the labour market. Although general guidelines of the structure and content of educational programs are legislatively set, faculties own powers to determine the content of the program and targeted competencies, individual courses for students (Lähteinen et al., 2017). In Finland, cooperation has been established within the framework of the National University Network of Social Work (Sosnet), which enables

active national management of education and discussion of the content and structure of social work degrees. Curricula are based on social work courses and interdisciplinary contextualization, particularly in the social and behavioural sciences. Educational programs are compiled on the competency-based approach, which involves the formation of professional skills of specialists. Education for training specialists in social work is based on university researches in social sciences. Also in educational institutions, students are provided with professional and practical knowledge, which makes it possible to obtain the status of a qualified social worker. Education develops academic abilities and at the same time research skills. In the learning process, students learn to understand society based on a scientific approach, master the skill of critical target, which occupies a central place in the curriculum. Thus, the Finnish system of education in social work is an integrated research model, where studies are integrated into educational programs (Lähteinen & Matthies, 2021).

The French education system applied for training future social workers is based on school education and on-the-job training (internship). Practical activities of students always occupy a significant part of the educational program. Various education reforms in France (2007, 2011 and 2018) have ensured the change of educational programs of educational institutions in accordance with changes in social practice and European education standards. The main elements of these education reforms were as follows:

1. Establishing professional guidelines for skills, activities, training and certification systems – since 2007 – structured diplomas, forasmuch as training programs is organized around a defined list of skills. This has become a main basic change in the culture of social work educational program. This has ensured increased mobility of specialists and a more individualized educational career path. Individualization of curricula is now a key main element of educational courses. Educational institutions develop the content and structure of education for their combination with students' courses. Students are given the opportunity to improve or get a certificate for the skills that Gateway Systems have been purchased through the new mechanism.
2. A modern approach to alternative education has been implemented, which contributes to the professionalization process transformation. Places of internship have become a qualification space: the field of internship of specialists is in contractual relations with institutions for the training of social workers. Training is built on the basis of the tutoring system. Managers offer internships based on expertise in which they are competent.

Internships in the French social services training system have always played a significant role in education; however, recent reforms have structured and strengthened the educational environment where theoretical and practical skills are formed. Reforming of the French education system for social work specialists has ensured the transition from preparatory schools to higher educational institutions. These reforms have enhanced the role of research in education and ensured the acquisition of the necessary skills of social workers (Bergougnan & Fondeville, 2021).

In Germany, educational programs for training specialists in social work field are an important part of professional training in accordance with social-economic challenges. The process of academicization of social work, which had begun in the 1970s, became a prerequisite for the emergence of modern structures and conditions of education in the field of social work. After the establishment of applied sciences universities, they began to offer social work programs. Currently, in Germany, they are called universities of applied sciences (UAS). For 30 years, these programs have been merged into social work programs in almost all educational institutions. However, in the field of social sciences, many subjects and programs related to social work continue to exist. A feature of Germany in the training of specialists is a scientific and pedagogical program with an emphasis on social pedagogy that studied at universities. In some cases, through universities are studied without disciplinary relations with educational sciences. In 2019, 132 362 students studied social sciences in Germany (including social work, social sciences, sociology, social pedagogy, but excluding pedagogical sciences) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022); and 94 801 of these students were women (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). Such statistics suggest that social work is still popular as a professional in women in Germany. In the country, mainly social work courses are studied in educational institutions, the organization of which lies with the state, Church, as well as more and more cases of private financing. In recent years, the number of students is growing. Today, almost all educational institutions offer magistracy programs in the field of social work. Universities have a high level of influence on the development of social work.

Universities have a significant impact on representatives of the scientific community thanks to the research activity and reputation built into their structure. Another feature of education in Germany lies in the fact that score in the field of social work is significantly different in different federal lands. Differences in the education system are manifested in the duration of research, general structure and learning subcs. Therefore, it is impossible to give an exact characteristic of models of training, subjects, structure and conditions of education in the field of social work. Many federal districts have general features of education, for example, by most students studying the methods of social work, the rules of communication, law, sociology, psychology, and medicine during research. Many German regions have developed double research models in the field of social work in order to form practical experience. Faculties of social work are self -organized in the Department of Social Work (FBTS, Fachbereichstag Soziale Arbeit). FBTS is the national official representative of faculties and departments of social work in state and church universities. Being the highest collegiate body of academic self-governance, FBTS brings together the professional, educational and organizational activities of about 80 seats or members. One result of FBTS' work is the development of the Qualification Framework for Social Work (Qualifkationsrahmens Soziale Arbeit – QR SozArb) as a education framework in the social work field in Germany. QR SozArb is a subject specific framework for social work that defines key competencies in accordance with the Bologna Process. In the preamble, the Social Work Qualification Framework refers to the international definition of social work, describing competencies in accordance with the international context. The document defines social, technical, and methodological and personnel skills, takes into account the ethical component of the activity of a social worker. It has been

also determined that skills are formed in a disciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary way (Laging, Schäfer & Lorenz, 2021).

In Italy, the training of social workers uses an approach based on competencies to overcome social problems, challenges and changes in the social security system. Education in the field of social work is included in the academic context and is provided at universities. Italy does not have a double system of polytechnic and academic universities, unlike other European countries. Social work is currently included in the university system of higher education as well as almost all other professional educational courses. Such professional programs, for example, for teachers, nurses, rehabilitators, were gradually included in the higher education system in similar areas. In 2018, 98 Italian universities proposed 36 courses of bachelor's level and 35 courses of the master's level in the field of social work. However, at the same time, the number of courses has declined over the past few years: for example, in 2014 there were 44 baskets. This is a consequence of the reform of the government and new criteria established by the government of the country. The number of enrolled every year is almost stable, and about 1,300 students participate in undergraduate programs at the national level. In addition to the minimum requirements established by the ministry, each higher educational institution can freely develop plans and special training programs, compile programs in accordance with its vision, visit, development strategy and respond to local needs. Universities can use the remaining loans and resources thanks to their own autonomy. Thus, important decisions are made at the local level and at the level of a separate university, and the composition of the university leadership affects the composition of the educational programs of social work. The influence also has existing educational institutions in the direction of social work. Moreover, due to the growth of autonomy due to the reform of 2010, the diversification of educational programs in the country has increased. Subjects in the field of social work develop the principles, methods and basics of social work (usually at different levels), organize social services, seminars and tutoring for the practical training of students (Bertotti, 2021).

Social security services in Lithuania were little developed due to chaos in connection with the transition from the Soviet system to democracy. As a result of the transition of the state, many families and individuals fell into new social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, crime and lawlessness. Students' duties in the first year of study in the field of social work are focused on such skills as involvement / empathy, solving problems, evaluation, communication and work with any available resources. In the second year of training, students usually conduct research, focusing on applying the main skills of social work in evaluating and solving problems at the level of social protection system. In this way, students and graduates of the Centre created several new public programs (Lorenz, 2021). In the scientific work of Tunney & Kulys (2014), a model of field education is proposed in order to promote the formation of basic knowledge, values and social work skills, the connection establishment between educational institutions and social security institutions, and the impact determination of education programs on the community well-being in Lithuania. The model includes the components as follows: 1) Core social work

professional values, knowledge, and skills; 2) Educational program development and development of student skill; 3) Agency-service development among placement agencies; 4) Impact on the community as a result of the educational program's contribution to social service development.

The education of specialists in the social work field in Cyprus remains at an early stage of development. There is not any state faculty established in the country, despite the obvious need to train specialists in social work at state universities. The country also lacks a culture of social work, regardless of the existence of private programs. This may be due to the fact that social welfare has never been one of the priorities of local political policy. The modern educational system is a mixture of various educational approaches and models from different educational systems (British, American), adapted to the realities of Cyprus. Social work in the country was the result of the collapse of traditional systems that supported and ensured the cohesion of social systems. The maturity of the education system in the training of social workers in such countries as the USA and Great Britain played an additional role in the transfer of knowledge to individual scholars from different cultural and educational backgrounds (Panagiotopoulos & Zachariades, 2021).

5. Discussion

Educational training programs in the EU countries in the field of social work testify to the search for effective models and approaches to the training of social service specialists. In particular, the most common is competency-based approach, which has been implemented in Finland, Germany, France, and Italy. In the framework of countries, there is a significant differentiation of social needs depending on the structure of socially vulnerable segments of the population. In some countries, social workers are responsible for assessing people's eligibility to social benefits, which determines the need for relevant skills. In other countries, the emphasis is on counselling. In some cases, social responsibilities are defined by so-called gaps in the system, when other services, for example, the medical, educational or judicial systems, go beyond their powers, which cause a number of social problems for different categories of the population. This determines the content and structure of educational programs, pedagogical features of training, framework of qualifications. It should be noted that the methodological basis of training inherent in training models is gradually being transformed in the HEIs of EU countries. Methodological "schools" that have previously characterized learning models and training institutions, such as psychodynamic, psychosocial, behavioural or systems approaches, no longer predominate in these countries. Instead of that, pragmatic considerations guide the choice of teaching methods, with a strong emphasis on evidence-based practice and investigations (Ziegler, 2020).

The training of social service specialists is also characterized by the need to maintain orientation to national requirements from the point of view of the legislative framework, social policy, service structures and social-economic context, cultural factors. In addition, specialists should possess appropriate scientific status; they should focus on universal

aspects of human behaviour and social, economic and historical processes (Harrikari & Rauhala, 2018).

Thus, it is possible to identify several problems in the system of training of social service specialists in the EU countries. There are considerable disagreements in the academic level and status of education in the field of social work. Despite the universal desire for full "academization", which means access to universities at all three educational levels of bachelor, master and doctor of philosophy, there still remains a pronounced dualism between "classical" universities and other higher educational institutions offering a more professional orientation to education in the field of social work. However, it has been found that more and more the 8th degree-level training programs are appearing in German "universities of applied sciences". In most countries that have introduced a PhD in social work filed, there is still a dependence on so-called neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, psychology or pedagogy. The same applies to the qualifications of staff teaching social work courses. The requirement for a doctor of philosophy degree for staff holding academic positions is gaining popularity. This is especially evident in Italy, where 30 years ago the professional association carried out a strong campaign to train social workers exclusively in universities (Facchini & Giraldo, 2013). In EU countries, internships are also practised, structured and designed appropriately to help students achieve standards of professional responsibility.

For a number of countries where social work was in the process of becoming an academic discipline, the Bologna process was useful as a tool to achieve full integration into academic structures, to fulfil formal requirements and to justify the minimum duration of educational programs in the field of social work. The strict adherence to the rule of 3 + 2-year education cycles also meant that, for instance, Finland was forced to split its integrated 5-year program into two stages. Specialists in Germany opposed such standardization. In general, the idea that all university courses in EU countries should follow a three-year cycle with pre-defined levels of competence outlined in the Dublin Descriptors has become acceptable. However, there was uncertainty regarding the qualification level of training programs in the field of social work. Taking into consideration the increasing demands on the social work profession arising from increasingly complex social needs, it is not realistically possible to cover all areas of practice and all methods at the bachelor's level. However, students enrol in specialized master's and even PhD courses without adequate funding and support on the part of employers. At the same time, training programs for social service specialists are mainly offered at the expense of students. Therefore, the majority of students are looking for a job already after obtaining the first educational level. Accordingly, employers, as a rule, do not recognize higher qualifications in terms of a higher level of salary.

It is also worth considering the issue of specialization within the training programs of social services specialists. Some countries have always emphasized the general nature of education, which would allow graduates to find work in various fields and acquire the necessary specialized skills "on the job place". Others, however, have supported separate

areas of specialization from the very beginning. Despite attempts to cluster training around pre-defined areas of social work, the various fields of social work practice are increasingly differentiated due to new social requirements. The bachelor's degree courses do not provide sufficient time to cover other disciplines, such as family work, medical or psychiatric social work, disability, probation, and work in educational institutions. Practical social issues such as community work or community service or work in crisis situations such as with refugees or during a pandemic are also not taken into account. Furthermore, it is a paradoxical trend that the idea of an organically structured accumulation of knowledge and skills, starting from a common core and branching out into increasingly specialized areas of practice and methods, is disappearing. At the academic level of the humanities, this shift away from the model of basic and specialized methodological fields can be explained by the influence of postmodernism and its critique of "dominant narratives". On a practical level, agency policy leans towards the demands of pragmatism ("what works best"), for which evidence-based learning models built on empirical research form the basis in parallel to empirical developments in medicine.

4. To a large extent, it depends on the issue of accreditation of training courses. In countries where it is a matter of state power, the influence of political priorities and lobbying is significant. If this liability is delegated to the corresponding professional association, this can lead to greater autonomy or practical orientation. In the part where it is completely left in the academic bodies, there is a danger of a clash with professional and professional interests or agency; As a result, when the curricula becomes too "academic", employers receive more power in which graduates they want to hire in certain positions. The professional quality of education, however, depends not so much on the procedural organization of accreditation, but also on the content that was formulated, for example, in the form of a "qualification structure", which were introduced between academies and representatives of the profession, which were recently agreed in Germany. In the part where this was not achieved, there is a tendency, especially after privatization both in the provision of services and in education in which the title and qualification differences are not crazy. It seems that this happens, for example, in Latvia, where in parallel with social workers there are professions such as "social rehabilitologists", "organizers of social benefits", "social guardians" and even "social workers of charitable organizations (Karitas)" have grown. Nevertheless, progress can be achieved only when all interested parties in the field of vocational education in the field of social work are combined together, instead of leaving quality control in only one institution.

5. A separate issue is the professional registration of social work graduates as a prerequisite for employment in appointed positions in the social work. In this regard, the contradiction between such positions remains mainly unresolved, namely: professional interests that often arise from the example of other professions, such as psychology or medicine, which through their "guilds" managed to establish a high degree of autonomy and control from access to access their professions with appropriate political influence; academic interests that can consider registration as a restriction on innovation based on research, but there is a risk that obtaining higher education does not guarantee automatic

admission to a professional register; wider political interests, striving either to restriction, leave the problem of employment in the free labour market and its changing requirements, or influence the profession, imposing the ideological conditions of registration. Maintaining a professional registry, of course, is a means of ensuring the quality of services and ensuring that licensed specialists are held accountable for their practice. Nevertheless, it greatly depends on, for example, on the constant updating of skills and how cases of negligence are considered. The risk of "depression" of social work arises not so much from the absence or weakness of the regulations on registration, but also from the tendency to privatize public services that can bypass registration.

6. Conclusion

Social work as an educational training program includes three educational levels: bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies. In general, in the EU countries, general requirements regarding the structure and content of educational programs are determined, which are established by legislation. Universities remain empowered to determine the program content and target competencies of specialists, the content of individual courses. This contributes to increasing the autonomy of educational institutions for the training of specialists, increasing the diversification of educational programs. Curricula are based on social work courses and broad interdisciplinary contextualization. Educational programs are compiled on the competency-based approach, which involves the formation of professional skills of specialists. Changes in curricula in accordance with changes in social practice and European education standards are also characteristic for educational institutions specializing in the training of social workers, as well as the growing role of practical experience, internships, and research projects. The training programs use the competency-based approach in order to overcome social problems and changes in social security systems.

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