Perspectives of Handling Work: Bridging the Curriculum and the Practice of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Professional social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change, development, cohesion, and the empowerment of individuals, families, and communities through principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities. The prospects of social work as a discipline in India are promising due to the country's complex social issues, the growing need for social services, and emerging opportunities in sectors like healthcare, community development, and social advocacy. Social work covers most of these aspects, positioning it as a vital field. Social work imparted through Higher Educational Institution (HEI)s has a significant role in implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and partially fulfilling the Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda. In this backdrop, this paper emphasised on bringing out the opinions of both the educators and aspirant professional social workers in aligning academic knowledge with real-world practice, equipping with the professional social workers with required skills, ensuring knowledge, and values necessary for professional success.

Methodology: Respondents included social work educators and social work students from West Bengal covering both government aided universities and private/ self-sponsored courses run by government universities. This study used concept-mapping; a mixed methods approach with qualitative procedures used to generate data that can then be analysed using quantitative methods. As a part of the qualitative aspect, brainstorming sessions were conducted separately with each group (educators and students) to identify concise statements. As a part of quantitative aspect, descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to analyse the data.

Results: A total of 105 statements were extracted into 14 parts using concept-mapping method. Perceptions regarding factors related to curriculum varied between the two groups, with the educators assigning significantly higher ratings to the importance of curriculum and the impact of utilization of skill enhancement. Sustaining job or practice concerns (like, salary and funding) were rated among the most important aspects and least likely to change by both categories.

Conclusions: Social work education in reference to NEP and SDG is a complex process, and educators and students may hold different opinions regarding the impact of social work curriculum. But efforts must include inputs from both the groups at multiple levels to bridge theories into practice.

Keywords: Social work education; practice; curriculum; sustainability;

INTRODUCTION

India's diverse population, constituting a significant portion of the world's population, about 36 % of world's population, creates a pressing demand for social scientists to address a wide array of social needs, including healthcare and education. With immense population pressure, the need to address a range of social needs, like health care education etc. have emerged. In response to this situation, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) India Index tracks the country's advancement toward achieving the global goals and targets, assessing progress at both national and state levels and the SDG Goal 4 is of paramount importance as it focuses on education (United Nations, 2024), which is a foundational pillar for achieving sustainable development worldwide. SDG Goal 4 is significant because it recognizes that education is a fundamental human right and a catalyst for positive change in various aspects of society. It promotes inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities for all, contributing to a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable world. Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and National Education Policy 2020 strive to improve the quality and accessibility of education across the country by emphasizing on promoting education. The fourth SDGs of 2030 agenda ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. Additionally, in Indian context, the NEP 2020 emphases on higher education with a target of increased Gross Enrollment Ratio to 50 % by 2035 through implementing holistic multidisciplinary education, expanding the purview of the open and distance learning, promoting online education and digital education, providing universal access to education, quality education, skill development, promoting professional education, gender parity and inclusivity (MHRD, GOI, 2020) through various initiatives.

Rise of Social Work as a discipline in India

Social work as a discipline in India is in the rising demand (Li, et al., 2021; Healy & Thomas, 2021; Steve, 2020) and is driven by several key factors. First, the country's vast and diverse population presents numerous social challenges (Berg-Weger, 2019), ranging from poverty (Alok, 2020; Gupta, 2013) and inequality to healthcare disparities (Government of India, 2017; Johar, et al., 2018) and gender-based violence (Reji, 2024), necessitating skilled professionals to address these complex issues (Germain, 1979). Additionally, the government's increasing focus on social welfare programmes and policies (Gentilini, et al., 2020), along with the expansion of the non-government organization sector (Usmani, et al., 2022; Wiseberg & Scoble, 1981), creates a growing demand for trained social workers who can collaborate with these entities to implement and manage social development initiatives effectively (Thompson, 2020). Moreover, the evolving landscape of healthcare, mental health, and community development underscores the need for social workers who can provide counselling, support (Horner, 2018), and advocacy in these critical areas. Lastly, the corporate sector's engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives further augments the demand for social work professionals (Gaither, et al., 2018; Sharma, 2020), as they play a vital role in planning and executing CSR projects aimed at benefiting society (Kumar, 2019).

Social Work in Higher Educational Institutions (HEI)

Social work within HEIs is poised for transformative growth (Gulalia & Subudhi, 2021) under the framework of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 envisions a holistic and multidisciplinary education system that places a strong emphasis on experiential learning and community engagement (MHRD GOI, 2020)—core tenets of social work education (Parker, 2020). HEIs are now increasingly integrating social work programmes that align with the NEP's objectives, fostering a robust curriculum that blends academic knowledge with practical fieldwork (Patel, 2023). This alignment ensures that students not only gain theoretical insights but also develop critical skills to address real-world social challenges. By encouraging interdisciplinary approaches and community partnerships, HEIs under NEP 2020 are positioned to produce socially conscious professionals equipped to drive systemic change and promote social justice. Moreover, the policy's emphasis on research and innovation in higher education enhances the role of social work in developing evidence-based practices (Singhal & Svenkerud, 2018) and policies (Baron, 2018), further solidifying its impact on societal development.

Equipping social workers with robust academic knowledge is essential for their professional development and effective practice. Academic training in social work provides a foundation of theoretical frameworks, ethical principles, and evidence-based methodologies that inform professional decision-making and interventions (Thompson, 2020). This comprehensive educational background enables social workers to critically analyze social issues, understand the complexities of human behaviour, and apply appropriate strategies to support individuals and communities (Fook, 2022; Coulshed & Orme, 2018). Furthermore, academic knowledge fosters a commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth, empowering social workers to stay current with emerging trends and best practices in the field (Morley, 2019). This continuous development is crucial for addressing the evolving needs of diverse populations and for advocating for systemic changes that promote social justice and equity (Payne, 2020). By grounding their practice in academic knowledge, social workers can enhance their competency, credibility, and impact within the social services sector.

Educators and students each play critical roles in bridging the gap between theoretical and practical aspects of social work education. Educators design integrative curricula, facilitate hands-on learning experiences, provide mentorship, and continuously update teaching methods through research. Students actively engage in learning, apply theoretical concepts in practical settings, critically reflect on field experiences, and pursue ongoing professional development (Sung-Chan & Yuen-Tsang, 2007). This collaborative effort ensures that academic knowledge is effectively translated into real-world practice, enhancing the preparedness (Petra, et al., 2020) and impact of future social workers (Beddoe, et al., 2018).

In this backdrop, studying effective methods for applying academic knowledge to real-world social work practice is crucial to ensure that social work graduates can effectively translate theoretical insights into practical interventions (Sung-Chan & Yuen-Tsang, 2007). This process helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and field realities, enhancing the preparedness and efficacy of social workers. Identifying gaps between theoretical education and practical application highlights the need for curriculum adjustments, such as increased hands-on training

and community-based projects, and underscores the importance of ongoing professional development. By addressing these discrepancies, social work education can better equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to address complex social issues, ultimately leading to more effective and impactful practice. Hence the objectives of the study are as follows-

- To investigate effective methods for applying academic knowledge to real-world social work practice.
- To identify gaps between theoretical education and practical application.

METHODS

Quantitative Concept Mapping Framework
To quantitatively map the concept of the study, the structure of the analysis was constructed into distinct categories which are as follows-

Distinct Categories		
Types of Participants	**Institution Type**	**Learning Mode**
Educators	Government University (central and state)	Regular Mode
Students	Government-Affiliated Self-Financed Courses (State)	Distance Education Mode
	Private University Teachers	

Study context
The study covered the universities of West Bengal that offered social work at undergraduate and post graduate levels. These universities cover both government aided universities and private/ self-sponsored courses run by government universities. These universities offer either regular mode of teaching or online and in few cases through both the modes.

Participants
Participants included 31 stakeholders representing diverse social work educators and social work students from West Bengal which included both categories of respondents from one of the central government universities (run in regular mode), from state government run self-financed course (run in regular mode), state university running distance education, state university running in dual mode and private university running through regular mode of studies. At the first level, the educators from different universities were contacted. The students were then contacted through the facilitation of the educators. There were no exclusion criteria.

Study Design
This study employed the usage of concept mapping (combines qualitative procedures to gather data, which may then be examined using quantitative approaches) which is a systematic research approach that allows a group to articulate their ideas on any subject and visually express these ideas in a map (Trochim, 1989). This strategy has been applied across various disciplines, such as research in various areas especially in health services and public health (Aarons, et.al, 2009) and in higher education (Machado & Carvalho, 2020).

Procedure

At first the researcher met with a mixed (across levels) group of stakeholder participants and explained that the objectives of the study which was to investigate effective methods for applying academic knowledge to real-world social work practice and to identify gaps between theoretical education and practical application. They then cited and described four specific components of bridging the curriculum and the practice of social work representing the most common types of aspects that might be focused (e.g., curriculum component (core knowledge area, skills development, field practicum), career preparation (career services, professional development), area of job market alignment (employer expectations, job opportunities) and support systems (mentorship programmes, peer support, career fair or networking)). In addition to a description of the present scenario of social work practice in India, participants were provided a written summary of the requirements of NEP and SDG. The researcher then worked with the study participants to develop the following 'focus statement' to guide the brainstorming sessions: 'What are the factors that needs to be emphasized so that the satisfaction level of real experiences and effectiveness of best practices of social work as a discipline become more?' Brainstorming sessions were conducted separately with each stakeholder group (educators and students from different types of universities) to promote candid response and reduce desirability effects. In response to the focus statement, participants were asked to brainstorm and identify concise statements that described a single concern related to the gap between theoretical education and practical application. Participants were also provided with the four aspects of social work theory and practice. Statements were collected from each of the brainstorming sessions, and duplicates statements were eliminated or combined by the investigative team to distill the list into distinct statements. Statements were randomly reordered to minimize priming effects. Researcher met individually with each study participant, gave them a pile of cards representing each distinct statement (one statement per card), and asked each participant to sort similar statements into the same pile, yielding as many piles as the participant deemed appropriate. Finally, each participant was asked to rate each statement describing what real experiences influences the satisfaction and use of social work as a discipline on a 0 to 4 point scale on 'satisfaction' (from 0 'not at all satisfied' to 4 'extremely satisfied') and 'effectiveness' (from 0 'not at all effective' to 4 'extremely effective') based on the questions, 'How satisfying is this factor to the social work practice?' and 'How effective is this factor?'

Analysis

The analyses employed concept mapping techniques, which involved the use of multidimensional scaling (MDS) and hierarchical cluster analysis. These techniques were used to group items and concepts and create a visual representation of how objects clustered among all participants. A similarity matrix is generated by organizing the card sort data of each participant in rows and columns, indicating whether they categorized each pair of statements in the same category. The cards that were not sorted together received a score of '0'. The matrices for all subjects were combined, resulting in an overall square symmetric similarity matrix for

the entire sample. Therefore, each cell in this matrix has the capacity to hold whole numbers ranging from 0 to the total count of individuals that organized the statements. The value of each cell represents the number of individuals who grouped each pair together. The MDS technique was employed to evaluate the square symmetric similarity matrix and generate a two-dimensional "point map." This map visually represents each statement and the distance between them, as determined by the square symmetric similarity matrix. Each statement was depicted as a numbered point, with points that were closer together indicating a higher level of conceptual similarity. The stress value of the point map was a quantitative measure of the accuracy with which the MDS solution represents the original data, suggesting a high level of correspondence. The acceptable range for the value was between 0.10 and 0.35. Lower values indicate a higher level of accuracy or suitability, as mentioned in reference (Concept Systems Incorporated, 2024). When the Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) technique did not accurately represent the original data (i.e., the stress value is very high), it indicated that the distances between statements on the point map were significantly different from the values in the square symmetrical similarity matrix. When the data accurately corresponds to the solution, it indicated that the distances on the point map closely match or were identical to the distances derived from the square symmetrical similarity matrix.

Next the square symmetric similarity matrix data from the MDS analysis was used to prepare cluster analysis, which grouped together statements that were theoretically similar. A cluster map was made by grouping words together and connecting them to the point map. To choose the best cluster solution, the researchers looked at different options (12 clusters, 15 clusters, etc.) and then decided on the best model based on how easy it was to understand. It was felt that adding another cluster (going from 14 to 15 cluster groupings) would not make the data more meaningful, which meant that the data was interpretable. Next, all the people who took part in the study at the beginning were asked to help the researcher figure out what each cluster meant and what each of the end clusters should be called.

Researcher calculated and displayed 'satisfaction' cluster ratings for both the educators and student groups on separate maps. Additionally, 'effectiveness' cluster scores were calculated for both educators and student groups. The ratings on the cluster rating map were a twofold averaging of participant ratings for each statement across all statements in each cluster. This results in a single value indicating each cluster's rating level. Therefore, even little changes in cluster averages were likely to be relevant (Trochim, et al., 2003). The educator and students were compared for mean cluster judgments of importance and changeability using T-tests and effect sizes estimated using Cohen's d (Cohen, 2013).

During concept mapping, pattern matching was used to analyze the correlation between satisfaction and effectiveness ratings for educators and students' groups. Pattern matching involved bivariate comparison of cluster average ratings for various raters or ratings. Pattern matching quantified the link between interval ratings at the cluster level using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, with larger correlations suggesting stronger congruence. It had created four pattern matches for this study. The first pattern match compared the average satisfaction ratings of the educators and student groups. It was compared cluster

average evaluations on effectiveness across educators' and students' group in a second analysis. Finally, pattern matching was employed to analyze the correlation between cluster satisfaction and effectiveness ratings in the educators' and students' groups.

Sample characteristics

The educators' group (N=19) consisted of two educators from central university regular mode, two educators from state university regular mode, three educators from state university distance education, six educators from state government affiliated self-financed regular mode, one educator from state government affiliated self-financed distance mode and three educators from private university regular mode. Again, the students' group (N=28) consisted of two students from central university regular mode, one student from state university regular mode, two students from state university distance education, five students from state government affiliated self-financed regular mode, two students from state government affiliated self-financed distance mode and two students from private university regular mode. Most of the participants were women (61.3%) whose ages ranged from 27 to 60 years, with a mean of 44.4 years (SD =10.9). For the students' group, 79% of the sample were female and the average age was 38.07 years (SD =10.8), while the educators' group contained only 47% females and had an average age of 49.60 years (SD =8.60). The overall sample was 74.2% urban population, 16.1% of rural population, and 9.7% from suburban area. Most participants had earned a Master's degree or higher education in social work.

Statement generation and card sorting

Participants from all stakeholder categories collaborated with the researcher to develop the focus statement. Brainstorming sessions were conducted individually with each of the stakeholder groups. A grand total of 230 statements were developed from the brainstorming sessions, encompassing all stakeholder groups. The study condensed the assertions by removing duplicates or merging related ones, resulting in 105 unique statements. The participants categorized the card statements into an average of 11 piles, with a mean of 10.7 and a standard deviation of 4.3. The median duration for sorting the statements was 25 minutes, with an extra 25 minutes allocated for rating the assertions.

Cluster map creation

The stress value obtained from the MDS analysis of the card sort data was deemed satisfactory at 0.26, which was within the typical range of 0.10 to 0.35 for concept-mapping projects. Following the MDS analysis, the point locations for statements from the card sort were established. Subsequently, hierarchical cluster analysis was employed to divide the point locations into distinct clusters that do not overlap. The researcher analyzed various cluster solutions and, based on the agreement among participants, identified a 14-cluster solution that most accurately represented the data.

Table 1: Details of Clusters

Sl. No.	Components to Compare	Clusters
1	Curriculum Components	Core Knowledge Areas Skills Development Field Practicum Reflective Practice
2	Career Preparation	Career Services Professional Development Job Search Skills Training
3	Job Market Alignment	Employer Expectations Job Opportunities Market Trends
4	Support Systems	Mentorship Programmes Peer Support Career Fairs and Networking Events Alumni Engagement

Cluster description

Twenty-two of the thirty-one initial study participants (through consensus in a single group meeting and individual phone calls) participated with the researcher in defining the meaning of each cluster and identifying an appropriate name for each of the 14 final clusters. The clusters included: as mentioned in table 1. The general themes have been presented as follows in each of the fourteen clusters under analysis.
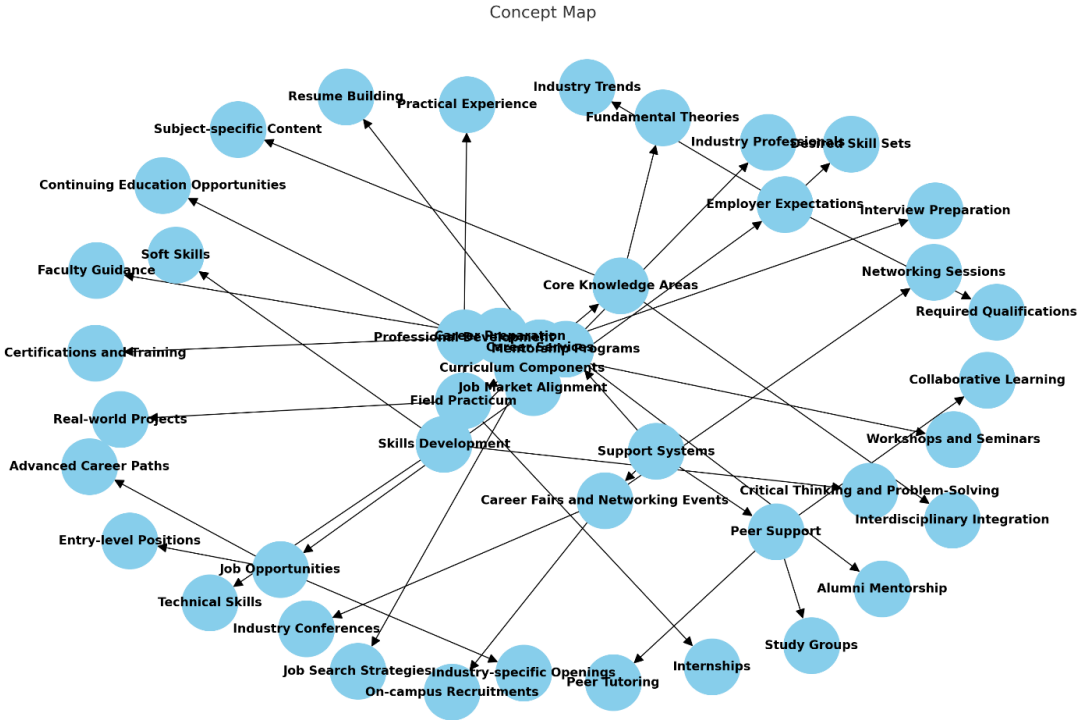

Concept Map

Figure no. 1: Visual representation of an effective tool explaining how different components and clusters work together to bridge the gap between education and employment

RESULTS

Table 2: Mean differences in satisfaction ratings for educators' and students' groups

	Educators' (N=17)			Students' (N=14)			T-test p-value	ES Cohen d
	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD		
Field Practicum	1	3.21	0.33	5	3.11	0.44	t = 0.76, p = 0.45	0.27
Job Opportunities	2	3.13	0.53	4	3.14	0.72	t = 0.02, p = 0.99	0.01
Core Knowledge Areas	3	3.11	0.35	2	3.24	0.81	t = 0.60, p = 0.55	0.21
Job Search Skills Training	4	3.09	0.44	6	3.09	0.60	t = 0.00, p = 0.99	0.00
Professional Development	5	3.06	0.28	1	3.28	0.49	t = 1.56, p = 0.13	0.55
Skills Development	6	2.92	0.60	12	2.88	0.78	t = 0.16, p = 0.87	0.06
Reflective Practice	7	2.82	0.47	8	3.07	0.75	t = 1.12, p = 0.27	0.39
Market Trends	8	2.72	0.47	9	3.05	0.69	t = 1.54, p = 0.14	0.54
Employer Expectations	9	2.71	0.37	10	3.01	0.66	t = 1.58, p = 0.13	0.55
Career Services	10	2.70	0.63	6	3.09	0.45	t = 2.63, p = 0.01	0.69
Peer Support/ Peer Counseling	11	2.67	0.65	14	2.74	0.69	t = 0.30, p = 0.77	0.10
Alumni Engagement	11	2.67	0.57	11	2.96	0.71	t = 1.21, p = 0.24	0.43
Mentorship Programmes	13	2.52	0.47	13	2.87	0.58	t = 1.90, p = 0.07	0.67
Career Fairs and Networking Events	14	2.48	0.50	3	3.21	0.59	t = 3.72, p < 0.01	1.33

Table 3: Mean differences in effectiveness ratings for educators' and students' groups

	Educators' (N=17)			Students' (N=14)			T-test p-value	ES Cohen d
	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD		
Career Services	1	2.69	0.63	1	2.71	0.57	t = 0.11, p = 0.92	0.04
Professional Development	2	2.57	0.05	4	2.51	0.62	t = 0.74, p = 0.47	0.11
Market Trends	3	2.55	0.55	3	2.57	0.62	t = 0.11, p = 0.92	0.04
Career Fairs and Networking Events	4	2.43	0.60	2	2.69	0.75	t = 1.02, p = 0.32	0.37
Employer Expectations	5	2.42	0.56	6	2.49	0.73	t = 0.32, p = 0.75	0.11
Job Search Skills Training	6	2.30	0.44	4	2.51	0.55	t = 1.20, p = 0.24	0.42
Reflective Practice	7	2.24	0.54	8	2.41	0.62	t = 0.80, p = 0.43	0.29

Mentorship Programmes	7	2.24	0.44	14	2.24	0.80	t = 0.01, p = 0.99	0.00
Field Practicum	9	2.17	0.49	10	2.39	0.61	t = 1.09, p = 0.29	0.39
Alumni Engagement	10	2.15	0.48	6	2.49	0.60	t = 1.75, p = 0.09	0.61
Skills Development	11	2.10	0.74	12	2.36	0.90	t = 0.88, p = 0.39	0.31
Peer Support/ Peer Counseling	12	2.04	0.68	11	2.38	0.74	t = 1.34, p = 0.19	0.47
Job Opportunities	13	1.97	0.47	9	2.40	0.70	t = 1.94, p = 0.07	0.71
Core Knowledge Areas	14	1.69	0.47	13	2.26	0.97	t = 2.14, p = 0.04	0.75

Cluster rating

Cluster rating maps were created to assess the satisfaction of real experiences and the effectiveness of best practices. These maps were made individually for the educators' group and the students' group. The number of layers in each cluster's stack represented the participants' perception of the relative significance of components within that cluster. A smaller cluster suggests that participants sorted statements into the same piles more frequently, indicating a higher level of similarity. The proximity of clusters to one another suggests that clusters are more closely associated with neighbouring clusters than with clusters that are farther away. The overall orientation of the cluster-rating map, such as top, bottom, right, or left, did not possess any inherent significance.

Tables 2 and 3 revealed the average evaluations of educators and students for each cluster, as well as the ranking order of the clusters. Additionally, the tables included the t-test and Cohen's effect size (d) statistics for perceived satisfaction and efficacy, respectively. Out of the fourteen clusters, only two clusters showed a significant difference in importance between the two groups. These significant differences occurred on the 'Career Fairs and Networking Events' (d = 1.33) and 'Career Services' (d = 0.69) clusters, where the students' group rated the clusters as significantly more satisfying than those in groups that of educators' group. Additionally, t-tests of mean differences among the 14 clusters only indicated significant differences in effectiveness ratings between the groups for 'Core Knowledge Areas', with the educators group rating them significantly less effective.

Pattern matching

Pattern matching was used to examine bivariate comparison of the cluster average ratings. Pearsons's product moment correlation coefficients indicated the degree to which the groups converged or diverged in perceptions of satisfaction and effectiveness. In general, agreement between the two groups regarding the cluster importance ratings (r = 0.44) was evident. When ranking for satisfaction ratings, five of the highest ranked six clusters were rated similarly in satisfaction for the two groups (Core Knowledge Areas, Job Opportunities, Field Practicum, Job Search Skills Training, and Professional Development). There was also concordance between the least satisfying factors with Peer Support/ Peer Counseling, Alumni Engagement and Mentorship Programmes all falling in the bottom four rankings for both groups. Results

from the pattern matching of effectiveness ratings revealed few differences between the two groups for the 14 domains as indicated by the high between-groups correlation (r = 0.78). Career Services were rated most amenable to effectiveness in both the educators' (M =2.69) and students' groups (M = 2.71).

Pattern matching was also used to describe the discrepancies between cluster satisfaction ratings and cluster effectiveness ratings for both the educators' and students' groups. There was a small positive correlation between satisfaction ratings and effectiveness ratings for the students (r = 0.20) where high satisfaction ratings were associated with higher effectiveness ratings. Conversely, there was a negative correlation between satisfaction and effectiveness for the educators' group (r = -0.39) whereby those factors rated as most satisfying were less likely to be rated as satisfaction to effectiveness. Challenges emerged in two distinct dimensions: Curriculum Components (Core Knowledge Areas and Field Practicum) and Career Preparation (Job Opportunities and Professional Development), which were both rated among the highest levels of satisfaction for both groups. Core Knowledge Areas (as a part of Curriculum Components) and Job Opportunities (as a part of career preparation) were rated among the least amendable to effective by both groups; however, Professional Development was rated as more effective of best practices by both groups.

DISCUSSION

A moderate amount of consensus was seen between two groups with a considerable level of agreement or similarity in how both groups view the relevance of the clusters. For instance, in interviews, both groups highlighted instances where students did not opt for subjects based on personal preference; rather they selected courses that aligned with their professional development as social workers, as permitted by the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS). In accordance to the ranking, significant distinctions were indicated in satisfaction and effectiveness ratings across various modes of education in social work. Government universities in regular modes exhibited notable satisfaction and effectiveness, attributed to established curriculums and experienced faculty. Private universities with regular modes, lead with high ratings, indicating strong alignment with employer expectations (required competencies and professional standards) and better job opportunities. In contrast, distance education modes across all institution types received lower scores, revealing challenges in providing effective field practicums, especially for those who have been working in sectors without much scope of social work (students working as Zomato partners or Uber driver, working in private banks with a huge target-based job). Regular modes, both in government and private institutions, excelled due to their greater emphasis on practicums and hands-on learning experiences, which were crucial for enhancing satisfaction and effectiveness in social work education. Private universities further distinguished themselves with comprehensive professional development programmes, including workshops and networking events, contributing significantly to higher satisfaction ratings. These insights underscored the importance of practical skills development and face-to-face interactions in enhancing educational outcomes and preparing students for successful careers in social work. While

comparing the efficacy ratings of the two groups, minimal discrepancies were detected across 14 distinct domains. The general pattern or trend of evaluations among the groups remained remarkably consistent, indicating a substantial level of agreement or similarity in their judgments of effectiveness throughout the assessed categories. For example, while comparing the effectiveness of different teaching methods, both educators and students consistently rated interactive classroom activities as highly effective, despite minor variations in individual preferences, like provision of audio-video study materials. Private institutions exceled in providing good career assistance, with government universities also performing well in this area. Nevertheless, remote education modalities exhibited a notable deficiency in terms of both satisfaction and effectiveness pertaining to career services. This discrepancy emphasizes a distinct lack of assistance for distant learners, emphasizing obstacles such as restricted availability of specialized career centres, industry networks, and customized job search tools. The advantages of private institutions in traditional mode were largely derived from their robust infrastructure, which included dedicated career centres and strong connections with organizations, enabling more effective career preparation for students. Suggestions from both the groups came up in handling these issues in distance education; potential solutions included improving virtual career counseling services, delivering comprehensive online job search tools, and providing virtual workshops for interview preparation.

Through pattern matching it was found that there was a great deal of agreement on the satisfaction with both the groups but rated the effectiveness of that same cluster differently. Pattern matching involved examining these ratings to understand if there were discrepancies - situations where someone might be highly satisfied with a cluster but perceived it as less effective, or vice versa. For example, educators rated the Job Search workshops highly in terms of satisfaction, appreciating the organization, content relevance, and student engagement. However, their perceived effectiveness ratings indicated that students struggled to translate workshop insights into successful job placements due to limited organization connections or follow-up support. Conversely, students expressed high satisfaction with the workshops, appreciating the practical advice and resources provided. Yet, their effectiveness ratings reflected concerns about the applicability of skills learned to actual job requirements or the need for more personalized guidance in the job search process. This pattern matching uncovered discrepancies between educators' and students' perceptions, highlighting where improvements could be made to better align satisfaction with tangible effectiveness in preparing students for job search and skill development in social work.

The educators and students in a social work programme, provided feedback on a new experiential learning project that aimed at developing counseling skills. Educators rated their satisfaction with the project highly, noting its alignment with course objectives and student engagement during activities. Meanwhile, students also expressed high satisfaction, appreciating the hands-on learning and mentorship provided. Despite minor discrepancies in specific aspects of satisfaction, such as timing or logistical arrangements, the correlation between educators' and students' satisfaction and perceived effectiveness was moderate ($r = 0.25$). This suggested that when both educators and students were satisfied with the experiential learning project, they tend to perceive it as effective in enhancing counseling skills and preparing students for practical applications in social work settings. This finding underscored

the importance of aligning educational experiences with both educator and student satisfaction to achieve successful learning outcomes in social work education.

In other situation, educators and students reported being engaged in evaluating a fieldwork practicum programme focused on mental health counseling. Educators expressed high satisfaction with the practicum's structured supervision, integration of theoretical concepts, and the supportive learning environment that were provided for students. However, their perceived effectiveness ratings revealed concerns about the variability in field placement experiences across different agencies, consistency in supervision quality, or challenges in bridging the gap between classroom learning and practical application in complex counseling scenarios.

While discussing about Core Knowledge Areas and Field Practicum around Curriculum Components, challenges related to the core knowledge areas taught in the curriculum and the practical field experiences (practicum) offered to students were reported. Despite being rated as highly important by both educators and students, challenges were observed in these areas, potentially indicating issues such as curriculum design, adequacy of practical training, or alignment with real-world needs. While certain aspects of the curriculum and career preparation were recognized as crucial by both educators and students, significant challenges existed within these areas. For example, challenges related to the core knowledge areas taught in the curriculum and the practical field experiences (practicum) offered to students were reported. Despite being rated as highly important by both educators and students, challenges were observed in these areas, potentially indicating issues such as curriculum design, adequacy of practical training, or alignment with real-world needs. Job Opportunities and Professional Development dimensions related to challenges in preparing students for their future careers, including aspects like job opportunities available upon graduation and the professional development support provided. Again, despite both educators and students rating this dimension as highly important, challenges were noted, which could include gaps in career guidance, networking opportunities, or skills development needed for the workforce.

CONCLUSION

Social work education in reference to NEP and SDG is a complex process, and educators and students may hold different opinions regarding the impact of social work curriculum. The quantitative concept mapping and qualitative data provided valuable insights into the strengths and challenges of different institution types and learning modes in preparing social work students for job placement. It was also found that the challenges and priorities identified within the educational context, highlighting areas where change may be more difficult (such as core knowledge and job opportunities) versus areas where effective practices were acknowledged and emphasized (such as professional development). Addressing these insights can help institutions better align their educational offerings with the evolving needs and expectations of students and the professional landscape. But efforts must include inputs from both the groups at multiple levels to bridge theories into practice. By addressing identified gaps and leveraging strengths, educational institutions can improve the effectiveness of their programmes, ensuring

that all students, regardless of their mode of learning, are well-prepared for successful careers in social work. Based on this study, the following can be some of the recommendations-

Enhancing distance education support by improving field practicum opportunities through virtual simulations and partnerships with local agencies working in allied with the specialization of the students. Also, emphasizing on strengthening career services and professional development for distance learners by offering online workshops, virtual career fairs, and better mentorship programmes. Developing collaboration across institution types where government universities can adopt some of the career services strategies of private universities, while private institutions can learn from the robust field practicums of government universities. Increased alignment with job market by regularly updating curriculum components based on organizations' feedback to ensure alignment with needs, especially for distance education programmes. Also, developing stronger partnerships between universities and organizations to facilitate job placements. programmes based on feedback from students, alumni, and employers. This continuous improvement cycle can help maintain high standards and adapt to changing industry requirements. Improving support systems by implementing robust online platforms for mentorship and peer support to ensure students from regular and distance modes receive comparable support and organizing virtual networking events and career fairs to provide equal opportunities for all students. Leveraging best practices across institution types and technology integration for both government and private institutions. Also, better educational policies should encourage partnerships between universities and organizations to ensure curriculum relevance and job market alignment, ultimately promoting holistic decentralization mechanism.

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