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## AN APPRAISAL OF THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN KANO STATE POLYTECHNIC

BY

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### **Abstract**

*The paper focuses on the role of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. The social work education programme has been in existence in the institution for a long period of time, but the problems of social work education affected the institution in a greater proportion to the extent that the problems upset not only the social work students and the staff, but the entire Polytechnic itself. Therefore, empirical study is essential in order to produce data needed to resolve the problems. The present study aims at assessing the growth, challenges and the implication of social work education as well as proffer solutions to the problems of social work education in the Polytechnic. To ensure a complete analysis of data, the study adopted a qualitative methodology. This involved in-depth interviews with 10 respondents whose responses were coded into themes based on the objectives of the study. The study revealed that the challenges of social work education in the Polytechnic include lack of social work professionals, lack of remuneration, lack of accreditation from the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), lack of sufficient research in social work, poor environment, inadequate facilities and infrastructures, lack of funding and lack of awareness of social work from the general public. Moreover, the results of the study also disclose that the government has an important role to play in bringing a lasting solution to the problem. So, the findings of the study require a multi-dimensional approach to address the problem. This includes concerted effort made to collaborate with the NBTE, Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators and Kano State Government in order to address the problems of social work education in the polytechnic.*

**Key words:** Challenges, social work education, social work practice, polytechnic

## 1. Introduction

Social work education is an academic discipline that involves rigorous education programmes in colleges, polytechnics and the universities in order to produce graduates in social work who are competent, effective, skilled, knowledgeable, ethical and confident practitioners in social work profession (Barnes, 2018). Social work education prepares students for practice in the work place at local, national and international contexts. The social work education demonstrates commitment to the principles of professional social work practice such as respect, social justice and professional integrity (Madan, 2020).

Furthermore, social work education provides a comprehensive approach to understanding human behaviour, teaching of social work practice, conducting social work research, analysing and developing social welfare policy and providing special guidance for the conduct of field practicum in social work in the colleges and institutions of higher learning (Linderman, 2012). One of the vital roles of social work education is to equip social work practitioners with the relevant methods, knowledge and skills necessary for effective practice in their day-to-day activities. The relevance and applicability of all these aspects of social work education should be clearly defined and evaluated in order to enhance the quality of social workers produced by various schools and institutes of social work (Coates, 2021).

Social work education in Kano State Polytechnic started in 1978, with the emergence of the Department of Social Development (Formally Department of Social Administration) as a result of the urgent needs of social workers in the state to take charge of the social welfare agencies, orphanage homes, homes for the disabled, handicapped and destitute. Similarly, there is an urgent need for medical social workers in the hospitals. The general idea was to respond to the crucial educational and manpower needs, especially in the field of social development (Musa, 2021).

At the initial stage, the department of Social Development introduced one-year Basic certificate in social welfare and two-year Diploma in social administration in order to produce the lower and middle level social welfare officers. The department runs different programmes including the Diploma, Higher Diploma, and Advance Diploma in Social Development. Other programmes include Diploma in Criminal Justice Administration and Certificate in Social Welfare. But with recent accreditation of courses in the department by the National Board Technical Education (NBTE), the department runs National Diploma and Higher National Diploma in Social Development (Musa, 2021).

Unfortunately, social work education in Kano State Polytechnic experienced lots of challenges. Therefore; the paper looks into these challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic from the respondents' viewpoints so as to identify the solutions to the problems, in order to enable Kano State Polytechnic to produce competent and professional social workers in the state.

## 2. Statement of the Problem:

The social work education in Kano State Polytechnic is currently faced with challenges. Social work education and practice is confronted with many problems affecting the discipline in one way or the other. These are related to curriculum design, such as lack of a uniform curriculum with other social work institutions, teaching of social work by the non-professionals, insufficient fieldwork practice by the social work students, inadequate research on social work education and absence of accreditation of social work courses.

Consequently, the challenges related to social work education need to be addressed collectively, to strengthen the social work education and training, improving its standards, enhancing the recognition of the profession and developing literatures in consonance with the social context and workforce requirements. The extents of these challenges in Kano State Polytechnic necessitate the need to conduct an empirical study. For that reason, the study is necessary in order to fill the existing gap in knowledge needed in social development planning.

### **3 Objectives:**

- To assess the growth of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic.
- To examines the challenges associated with social work education in Kano State Polytechnic and its implication.
- To proffer solutions to the problems identified in social work education in Kano State Polytechnic.

### **4 Literature Review**

#### **The Development of Social Work Education in Nigeria**

Social work education in Nigeria started receiving attention in the year 1974, when the Federal Government promulgated the Social Development Decree No. 12 which provide for the establishment of the social development division whose responsibility include the training of professional social workers and organization of social agencies (Ekpe and Mamah, 2017). Considering the teaming social problems in Nigeria, there seems to be no solution for the moment. However, social work education programmes have a task of producing social workers who are capable of applying professional knowledge and planned skills intervention to the various problem situations in order to assist individuals, groups and communities (Ekpe and Mamah, 2017).

The history of social work as a profession and social work education and training is both western and colonial. Even today, social work education across the globe continues to emphasize western ideas, often inappropriately (Askeland & Payne, 2016). The British model of professional social work was exported to Nigeria. This model was unable to address the unique issues and cultural characteristics of the majority of Nigerians. The critiques have increased to the extent that the social work profession in the western world has failed to come up with answers to many of its own most annoying social problems. Nigerian social work educators are therefore questioning the borrowing of such 'problematic' western social work knowledge (Mere, 2018). The western-influenced social work legacy is largely remedial in nature and underpinned by the charity and casework model that locates problems within individuals and their families. Currently, efforts are being made to contextualize the western influenced theories and practices of social work and training from one that emphasized remedial and charity work to one that lays emphasis on the developmental social work (Okoye, 2020).

The advent of social work education in Nigeria can be seen from the formation of the National Committee on Social Work Education in Nigeria (NCSWEN) in 1996. This committee was made up of the federal directors of social welfare, community development officers, youth and rehabilitation directors and the directors of all the components of social development in all the 36 states of the federation and Abuja as well as the heads of institutions offering certificate and/or diploma courses in social work. They were to meet every year and deliberate on social work education programmes being run by them and what could be done to move the Nigerian nation forward in the area of social development. The

committee encourages every state to establish a staff development institute, which was charged with the responsibility of running certificate and/or diploma courses. It was at the NCSWEN meeting of 1997 that the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) presented the final draft of the current curriculum for a National Diploma in Social Development in the Polytechnics, Social Development Institutes and Staff Development Centers in Nigeria, approved this to be run. NCSWEN has therefore made a significant contribution to the development of social work education in Nigeria over the years, until the national conference replaced it for Social Work Educators in 1998 (NASWE, 2021).

Similarly, the then Federal Ministry of Sports and Social Development organized the first national conference for Social Work Educators in Nigeria and it was held in Kano State Polytechnic conference hall from 22nd to 25 November 1999. Social work educators are drawn from several Polytechnics, Social Development Institutes, Staff Development Centers, and the Universities. The second national conference was held in Minna in the year 2000 while the third national conference of social work educators was organized by the then Federal Ministry of Sports and Social Development held in Akure from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2001. The fourth national conference of social work educators organized by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development took place at the Women Development Center, Lokoja, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2007 (Ejikeme, 2020).

In 2006, another project was formed at the University of Benin in the name of “Social Work in Nigeria Project” (SWIN-P). The project commenced in earnest with the first batch of the Master of Social Work (MSW) students enrolled in the program in the year 2007. Other components of the project include gender and the development of a strong professional social work association. It was not long before a social work educators were invited to Lagos through SWIN-P for a brainstorming meeting that ended on a hearty note with the establishment of Nigeria Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) on 5 May 2010, with a draft constitution ready on that very day (Ibrahim, 2021).

To standardized social work education and practiced in Nigeria, the National Board for Technical Education developed and released a minimum academic standard for the National Diploma in Social Development in 1997. The NBTE also released a minimum standard for the Higher National Diploma in Social Development programme with options in: (i) Social Welfare, (ii) Community Development (iii) Youth Development, and (iv) Home Management. The National Universities Commission (NUC) has also developed the Bench Mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) for the first-degree programme in social work (i.e. B.Sc. Social Work) in 2012.

The publication of the Journal, known as the African Journal of Social Work and Development, is a landmark in the history of social work education in Nigeria and Africa (NASWE, 2011). Similarly, social work can be traced to the colonial periods when Nigerians have varying degrees in social work education at different institutions of learning overseas particularly in the United Kingdom and America (Ejikeme, 2020).

## **5 Methodology:**

The paper employed a qualitative research design as the suitable method in this study, because it requires people’s knowledge, understandings, views, interpretations, experiences and interactions. The study was also made flexible in order to maximize the collection of intensive and high quality information for the success of the study.

The interview technique was adopted by the researcher to collect data from the respondents.

Therefore, in-depth interviews are considered to be the best to describe and understand the respondents' views on the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. This is in line with Schaltzman's and Strauss's (2013) assertion that the interview must be used to provide context and meaning. Their justification of the interview as a critical qualitative tool is pertinent to this study.

For this study, a semi-structured face to face interviews was conducted using an interview schedule provided by Sekaran (2013) in which the topic and questions are notified in advance before the actual interview sessions take place. The interview schedule was designed to encourage respondents to contribute their own ideas and share their experiences with relevant information and by providing their own knowledge, information or views on the relevant issues. The keenly nature and specificity of responses provided the substance of the descriptions that contributed to the effective material for tackling the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic.

A sample of fifteen respondents was chosen for the study. Five of them are academic staff in the department of social development and five respondents are social work students in the same department. They consist of both National Diploma II (ND II) and Higher National Diploma II (HND II) Social Development students. However, the remaining five respondents come from the senior management staff of the Polytechnic. The justification for these choices was to explore the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic from different angles. Time and budget constraints did not allow for a larger sample size.

The respondents consist of both males and females. A face to face interview was conducted with the respondents. And the data collected was interpreted using the thematic analysis method. That is to say the interview responses were transcribed by a researcher, and then followed by ordering, studying, coding and separating the transcripts into chunks. A researcher confirms the responses of the respondents by re-listening to the audio record of the interview to validate and verify the responses. A researcher read the transcripts several times to gain a deep understanding of the information and record the current, relevant information as categories. The data with evidence of the categories were continually collected from the interview transcripts and sorted into concepts. Themes reflecting recurring patterns of the concepts emerged into codes. From the codes, the themes were generated and the data are interpreted by making comparisons between the findings and the literature. Therefore, the researcher organised and gather all the results into a descriptive form. By doing so, the researcher obtained the required data on the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic.

Then, open ended questions were used during the intensive interviews. The duration of the interview was approximately 15 minutes per each respondent. Thus, the total amount of time spent for interview purposes of all the respondents amounted to approximately 10 hours, 35 minutes. Semi-structured interview format was adopted in this study. The respondents were encouraged to express their thoughts freely on issues pertaining to their beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding social work education in the polytechnic. All the interviews were audio recorded (with permission) and then transcribed at the early stages of data collection. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture respondents' emotions such as nodding, laughter, smiles, frowns and other indicators which aided in the data analysis.

The researcher listened several times to the recorded interview data. The pre-scheduled personal interviews were conducted with the staff at their offices, while

students in their respective classes. The data was then reviewed and transcribed in a written form. At the same time, the data is organized by question to look across all respondents and their answers to identify commonalities and differences.

## 6 Results

The results were presented and analysed on the data gathered from the interview of the respondents. The views of the respondents were examined and discussed as follows:

There are various challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. The themes emerged to explain these challenges through the interviews with the respondents. These respondents came from the three categories i.e. staff and students of the department of Social Development as well as the senior management staff of the polytechnic. The challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic identified by the respondents include poor environment, inadequate facilities and infrastructures, lack of social work professionals, lack of remuneration, lack of recognition of social work from the public, lack of accreditation from NBTE, lack of research in social work and lack of funding.

The respondents are categorized into two i.e. the staff and students. The staff comprises of both academic staff and senior management staff of the Polytechnic, while the students comprise of ND II and Higher Diploma II Social Development.

For instance, among the staff of the polytechnic, one of the respondents mention lack of social work professionals in Kano State Polytechnic. He further stated that:

*'The department doesn't have enough social work educators, most of them are sociology lecturers. Even after they start as sociologists, they can change to become social work educators... it is possible if they undertake training in social work at Masters and PhD. level the way other lecturers did in some institutions.'*

This followed by another respondent among the staff who explained that lack of remuneration to the lecturers is one of the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. He added that:

*'Lecturers are not well paid; social work educators were not given priority... So, lecturers are the government employees with the least remuneration, because their area is not a priority area... This is one of the challenges of social work education, not only in Kano state but Nigeria in general.'*

Similarly, a different respondent among the staff narrates the inability of the institution to have all their courses accredited by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), which is another challenge of social work education. She insists that:

*'Lack of accreditation of all our courses from the NBTE remains the challenge of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. Because due to non-accreditation, we cannot run Higher National Diploma programmes in Social Development and Criminal Justice Administration. And our inability to get these programmes accredited, our certificates has deficiency, especially outside Kano State.'*

However, among the students; they are of the opinion that the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic include unfavourable environment, inadequate

facilities and infrastructures. Therefore, one of the respondents among the students mentioned the following:

*'The inadequate hostel facilities plus inadequate classroom facilities, lack of up-to-date books in the library, lack electricity and inadequate funding constitute the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic... Those challenges are artificial because they can be addressed by the government if it wishes'.*

Likewise, another respondent among the students opined that the inability of the public to recognize the importance of social work programmes in the society is another challenge of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. She further stated that:

*'The most challenging factor in social work education in Kano State Polytechnic is lack of recognition from the general public... The Department of Social Development is offering various courses in social work, but unfortunately, people are not aware of the existence of the department talk less about the courses offered'.*

The themes underneath emerge from the respondents' descriptions of the solution to the identified challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. These solutions to the identified challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic uncovered by the respondents comprise of encouraging staff to go on social work training, provide all the necessary facilities in the institution, employ qualified lecturers with a social work background, ensure accreditation of courses by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), engage in sensitization campaign on the importance of social work, recognize the social work profession and provide enough resources.

One of the respondents among the staff confirms that the solutions to the identified challenges of social work education is to employ qualified lecturers who have a social work background and experience to impart knowledge to the social work students. He added that:

*'The only way to tackle the problems is to employ qualified lecturers who have social work background with a Bachelor or Master's Degree in social work, this can solve the problem of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic'.*

While, another respondent among the staff perceived that the solutions to the challenges of social work education is to ensure that the entire social work programmes are accredited by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). She suggested that:

*'All the departmental courses should be accredited by the NBTE, when these programmes are accredited, the courses will get wider popularity and acceptance from the general public and more students would tend to apply... When we succeeded in getting the accreditation, it is a great achievement of the department'.*

Similarly, respondent among the staff views that Staff training is very important as per as social work education is concerned. So, encouraging the staff to go on social work training is an important step in providing solutions to the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. He added that:

*'The management of Kano State Polytechnic must come in by encouraging the existing staff who are non-social workers to go on training in social work... Any staff that is not willing to go back to school should be stagnated. That is to say no any promotion for him in the future'.*

In the same way, respondent among the staff observes that providing enough resources to the institution by the government will assist in bringing a lasting solution to the challenges of social work education. She added that:

*'The government should recognize the role of the higher education sector in the state by providing enough resources... When the resources are available, it will enhance social work education'.*

Also, another respondent among the staff believes that embarking upon sensitization workshop by the government on the importance of social work can help in solving the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. He suggested that:

*'The institution should put more effort in advertising its courses not only in Kano State, but all over the country even with exaggeration. For example, by giving reference to some of our past students who performed brilliantly before and students that are currently in the universities advancing their knowledge... The institution should show the calibre of the students produced in social work. From such advertisement, we can draw the attention of the people, especially whose towns are closer to the school'.*

In the same direction, the respondent among the students clarifies that recognizing the importance of the social work profession by the government and the public is a step forward in solving the identified challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. He said that:

*'The government should at least see social work education as a very important discipline, because it is a helping profession, it is a discipline that exposes the students on how to go about helping people who are in need socially, mentally, psychologically and even financially...'*

In addition to that, the respondent among the students opine that the provision of all the necessary facilities needed in Kano State Polytechnic by the government would assist in solving the challenges of social work education in the institution. He further stated that:

*'The government must give adequate attention to the facilities needed in the institution so as to achieve the desired objectives...'*

## **7 Discussions**

The findings of the study revealed that the social work educators are not qualified; most of them are not professionals. Only one out of the eight staff in the department read social work. The rest are sociologists and psychologists. Even those staff who read social development at the diploma level, later on changed to sociology in the Bachelor or Master's Degree. This is similar to the findings of Dhembra (2012) which insist that lack of professionally-trained social workers is a major constraint on social work education in Africa. This problem can be



partly attributed to inadequate financial support for social welfare programmes, owing to chronic recession, conservative ideologies and misguided policies.

The findings further discovered that lack of remuneration is another challenge of social work education. Social work education in Kano State Polytechnic is not attractive because lecturers are underpaid compared to their counterpart in neighbouring states. This coincides with the findings of Mupedziswa (2017) which stated that lack of recognition social work education by the government manifests itself in the lower levels of remuneration and status accorded to social workers compared to other professionals with similar qualifications. As a result, social workers are very vulnerable to stress-generating situations such as role-overload, role-conflict, role-ambiguity, over-responsibility, and poor working conditions.

Likewise, the findings of the study have shown that lack of accreditation from NBTE is another challenge of social work education in the institution. Without accreditation by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the institution cannot run National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes. Therefore, most of the certificate awarded has deficiency, especially outside Kano State. This is similar to the findings of Thomas (2020) which narrate that unless a uniform system of accreditation on social work education is developed and enforced, the development of social work education and programmes on sound lines has been likely to proceed very slowly for a long time.

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that poor environment, inadequate facilities and infrastructures are the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic. However, conducive environment in the institution will enhance teaching and learning of social work. The institution is not attractive anymore because of inadequate hostel facilities plus inadequate classrooms. The facilities in the institution are not enough, no electricity, no adequate funds, no relevant books in the library and talk less about virtual library. This is similar to the findings of Adeyinka (2019) which believed that in a majority of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the classroom accommodation is grossly inadequate. As a result of the large enrolments, the classrooms and lecture theatres are usually overcrowded. In most cases, the chairs and desks are not enough; you see students sharing chairs, standing up, or sitting at windows or broken desks. When students are overcrowded like this, there is a stalling of the teaching-learning process and a disruption of the students' mental activity, a situation that generally militates against effective teaching and intellectual development.

Similarly, the study also found out that lack of recognition of social work education from the public serve as another challenge. The inability of the public to recognize the importance of the social work programmes offered by the institution is a serious problem. That is why the students have no interest in the course, which lead to the reduction of the number of those admitted, parents showed lackadaisical attitudes and the government indicated an element of neglect toward the social work profession. This is similar to the findings of Hall (2020) which confirm that lack of public recognition of social work as a profession is another critical shortcoming that has to do with its future prospects. The notion of the professional social work in the people's mind is in contradiction to the idealized image of the conventional social service worker who possesses the sterling qualities of heart rather than of mind. Similarly, according to Manshardt (2015) the non-recognition of social work tends to discourage and demoralize practitioners as well as those who might be interested in pursuing careers in this field of social work.

Similarly, the institution should put more effort in advertising its courses to the public in Kano State. When the potential students are enlightened, they may change their decision to

become social workers by joining the social work programme even after selecting another course of study. To succeed in this campaign Midgley (2017) suggested that there must be standardized quality of education and training that are provided by numerous school of social work across the world. These social work educational institutions differ from each other in terms of curricula, generic course, specialization offered, activities, focus, duration, training inputs of fieldwork components and so on. There should be a minimum standard of education and fieldwork training inputs provided to students in these institutions.

## 8 Conclusion and Recommendation

It is clear that, social work education in Kano State Polytechnic faces a lot of challenges and its solutions require the attention, contributions and cooperation of the government, social work educators, polytechnic management and philanthropists in the society. The role of social work education in the society cannot be over-emphasized. Social work education, if properly supported will produce qualified social workers that can assist members of the society socially, psychologically, emotionally and even economically in a professional way. The solutions to the identified challenges of social work education are regarded as blessings to the individuals, families, society and the country in general. The following recommendations have been put forward for the benefit of policy makers, stakeholders and change agents to in order to address the challenges of social work education in Kano State Polytechnic:

- The government should provide available facilities in the institutions. The facilities will enhance teaching and learning of social work so as to achieve the desired objectives.
- Staff with a social work background need to be employed. That is to say qualified social work educators who have a social work background and experience and who can impart knowledge to the students of social work. The qualified lecturers must possess a Bachelor or Master's Degree in social work.
- The government should engage in sensitization campaign on the importance of social work education. This will explore the status of social work education to the general public.
- The social work courses should be accredited by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). The state government should understand that the success of the programme depends on the number of the courses accredited in social work, and therefore accreditation must be given priority by fulfilling the condition of NBTE for accreditation in the institutions.
- The schools of social work suffer greatly from inadequate funds for research and development. Hence, there is a need for availability of greater funds, which would encourage not only innovative social work research, but would bring together social work scholars from across the country to share ideas and innovations without compromising on quality.
- A standard curriculum for social work education must be developed across the country, which will suit to the local context of different schools of social work.
- The social work education must go beyond the limited pre-existing framework of social work in the local context. From this, the generic programmes in social work must be removed and new specialization sought to be introduced which are more appropriate to the different socio-cultural contexts with special focus on rural social issues. For this reason, there is a need to establish new school of social work in the cities and rural areas.
- The social work research is an area that needs more attention in social work education, in order to develop a sound theoretical base for the profession. The research needs to be strengthened with adequate infrastructure and teaching facility, which would help professional practitioners develop a grounded theory building in the profession for the development of the discipline.

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