

Social Work Education in Türkiye: Opinions of Students, Academics, and Social Workers

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Social work practices around the world began to take root in the West from the second half of the 19th century. Social work started to be institutionalized from the beginning of the 20th century and social work education spread throughout the world following the opening of the first social work schools in Western countries. In Türkiye, university education, which was organized under the name of Social Work Academy in 1961, continued to be conducted within the Social Work Department of Hacettepe University. As of today, social work undergraduate education is given in seventy universities in Türkiye. In this study, it is aimed to look at the current situation and future of social work education from the perspective of students, academics, and social workers. The participants of the research, which was designed in a qualitative method, consist of four students, four academics, and four social workers. It was planned to conduct interviews with the participants using semi-structured questionnaires. The data obtained were subjected to content analysis and thematic coding was done first, and then main and sub-themes were created. The findings of the study were discussed in the light of current literature.

Keywords: social work, undergraduate, education, strengths, and weaknesses qualitative method

Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects of human life. It encompasses more than just learning, which refers to permanent behavioural changes resulting from experience. The philosophy and methods of education have evolved from traditional to modern approaches. Regardless of its content and scope, the process called education always maintains its critical importance, starting with the function of preparing the individual for life from an early age and extending to the function of providing a profession during youth. There are several dimensions to the educational process that leads to professional competence. At this point, university education is undoubtedly the first to come to mind. In order to be able to practise a profession that requires a certain level of competence, both in the world and in Turkey, it is necessary to be educated at university level. The profession of social work, which is the main subject of this study, and professions such as medicine, teaching and engineering require a minimum of undergraduate education. After undergraduate education, more advanced levels of education, such as master's and doctorates, may also be possible.

The emergence of social work in the world is related to poverty on the sociopolitical axis and is based on the goal of ensuring that everyone equally benefits from services and opportunities in society. Social work, which is closely related to

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social policies, ultimately aims to establish social justice by reducing social and economic inequalities. The West was a pioneer in the emergence of social work as both a profession and an academic discipline. Therefore, it is possible to see traces of the West in social work education all over the world. When we look at the historical development of social work, it is seen that England and the USA take the lead, and then there is a trend that spreads to Europe. Over time, this development was followed by the Soviet bloc countries and then the Asia-Pacific region (Austin, 1970). The discipline and profession of social work, like many branches of social sciences, is a younger field compared to the sciences. The beginning of social work education, which has been based in the West, especially in England and the USA since the last quarter of the 1800s, corresponds to 1961 in Türkiye (Alptekin, 2016; Onat, 2005). Social work education, which gained an institutional identity with the opening of the first social work schools in the West, today provides the training of many social workers from all over the world (Austin, 1997). Educational activities aimed at meeting the need for professional training in the field of social work were first put forward by Anna L. Daves at the International Congress of Charitable, Relief and Relief Societies held in Chicago in 1893. This idea was implemented as a six-week training course by the New York Benevolent Society in 1898, later the duration of this course was increased to six months and developed into the New York School of Social Work. This school was affiliated with Columbia University in 1940. In Europe, the first social work school was opened in Amsterdam in 1899. In 1904 and the following years, new social work schools were opened in Germany, Switzerland and England, and in 1910 the total number of schools in the five countries reached fourteen (Kut, 1968; Kut, 1983; Türkeri, 2023). In Türkiye, the Social Services Academy affiliated with the Social Services Institute, which was established in 1959, became operational and the General Directorate of Social Services was organized in 1963. In parallel with the educational needs in social services, Hacettepe University started social work education in 1967 (Kongar, 1972). As of today, the number of universities providing social work education in Türkiye is over sixty, including formal and non-formal education.

With the impact of digitalization, education processes have also begun to change. Digitalization of education means becoming independent of time and space by using technology and the internet. Especially with the widespread use of the Internet and the use of personal computers, educational activities can now be carried out in digital environments. This situation has spread rapidly in the last few decades and has become even more important with the Covid-19 epidemic. Due to the epidemic, many schools and universities had to resort to distance education methods. While digital education provides students with more flexible learning opportunities, it also offers teachers different teaching materials and interactive tools. However, digitalization also brings some difficulties. Factors such as access problems, technology skills, and internet speed may cause some students to be at a disadvantage in this new educational environment. Digitalization is transforming the understanding and methods of education, and this trend is expected to continue in the coming years. The phenomenon of digitalization inevitably directly affects social work education. Some methods or techniques that can be considered inherent in digital education, such as online education, distance education, hybrid education, have started to

become a part of social work education in many countries around the world. It is possible to say that social work education in Türkiye is just at the beginning of the digitalization process. In this study, it was tried to reveal the perspectives of students, social workers, and academics regarding social work education in Türkiye. In this respect, it is thought that concrete programs and practices for the relevant country will guide the education processes in Türkiye.

Literature Review

When the literature on the subject is examined, it is possible to come across studies at international and national levels. Gray and Fook (2004), in their work discussing the search for a universal social work (and of course the reflections of this search on education), focused on the distinction of "globalisation-localisation", Westernisation-indigenisation", "multicultural-universalisation" and "universal-local" based on the concept of "universal". Reisch (2013) discussed the future of social work based on the changing social work education and practices on the axis of neoliberalism. In his work, Lorenz (2107) prompts us to think about the crisis phenomenon that accompanies the 'modernity project' in a historical context, in the context of the critical role of social work education. The current study by Dali and Caidi (2023), in which they discuss the role and effects of information and technology education on social work curricula, based on Canada and the USA, is also important. In another recent study, Zengin, Alptekin, and Topuz (2023) investigated the status of social work education, bottlenecks, and expectations in education. When we look at the Turkish literature, some studies come forward. Two studies that focus on the history of social work education stand out. One of them was made by Tuncay and Tufan (2011), and the other was made by Kalaycı (2021). It is possible to come across two studies on social work education and practice courses. Sehman and Yolcuoğlu (2020) evaluated the functionality of social work education in Turkey from the perspective of open education social work department graduates. Yılmaz, Koçak, and İçağasıoğlu-Çoban (2022) analysed the practices in the curricula of departments providing social work education. The study conducted by Tuncay (2020) on the opportunities and obstacles of online social work education is also important.

In this study, it is aimed to reveal the opinions of students, academics, and social workers about social work education in Türkiye for more than fifty years. In this context, the sub-objectives expected to contribute to the research are as follows:

- How do social work students, academics, and social workers see the current status of social work education in Türkiye?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of social work education in Türkiye according to social work students, academics, and social workers?
- How do social work students, academics, and social workers evaluate the proficiency level of social work education in Türkiye?
- What are the aspects of social work education that need to be improved according to social work students, academics, and social workers?

- What do social work students, academics, and social workers think about the future of social work education in Türkiye?

Methodology

This section contains general information about the methodology of the study.

Research Design

This research, which aims to look at the current situation and future of social work education in Türkiye from the perspective of students, academics, and social workers, was designed with a qualitative method. Phenomenological research is a research design originating from philosophy and psychology, in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon as defined by the participants. These descriptions result in capturing the essence of the experiences of individuals who have various experiences with the phenomenon in question. This design has solid philosophical foundations and often requires conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; cited in Creswell, 2017). For these reasons, the phenomenological approach was preferred in this research.

Selection of Participants

The participants of the research, designed with a qualitative method, consist of four students, four academics, and four social workers. All participants reside in Ankara. There are four universities with social work departments in Ankara. One student was selected from each university to ensure representation. It was also taken into account that the students belonged to different grade levels (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade). Similarly, the same criteria were considered in the selection of academics. In the selection of social workers, attention was paid to the representation of different social work fields. Students, social workers, and academics were included in the study to address the issue from different dimensions. When it was thought that the answers obtained from the participants started to repeat, the interviews were completed. Some basic information about the participants is included in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information about the Study Participants

Study Group	Age	Gender	School/Institution	Field
Student 1	18	Female	Başkent University	Social Work
Student 2	19	Male	Hacettepe University	Social Work
Student 3	20	Female	Ankara University	Social Work
Student 4	21	Male	University of Health Sciences	Social Work
Social Worker 1	33	Male	Social Service Centre	Child Welfare
Social Worker 2	73	Male	Social Service Centre	Gerontological Social Work
Social Worker 3	28	Female	Courthouse	Family Court
Social Worker 4	50	Female	Hospital	Medical Social Work

Academician 1	43	Female	Başkent University	Family Welfare
Academician 2	40	Female	University of Health Sciences	Social Work with Children
Academician 3	36	Male	Hacettepe University	Disability
Academician 4	54	Male	Ankara University	Psychiatric Social Work

Data Collection Process

The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview form to collect data within the scope of the research. The data of the research was collected in the three-month period between January 2023 and March 2023. The interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and were audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

Analysis of Data

During the data analysis process, firstly the data obtained from the participants were deciphered. The resulting transcripts were combined into a single file. Considering the combined transcript, it was seen that the transcription contained a total of 135 pages and 45021 words in Arial 10-point font. After this process, Nvivo program was used to analyse the data. Thematic coding was done within the scope of qualitative analysis, and in this context, first the relevant codes were determined, and then sub-themes and themes were created through interrelated codes. The findings were discussed in the light of current literature.

Results

Thematic analysis of the data obtained from the participants in line with the design of the research is included in this part of the study. In parallel with the questionnaires used in the interviews, the opinions of the participants were revealed within five main themes.

Theme 1: Current Status of Social Work Education

In the introduction part of the study, it was mentioned that social work education in Türkiye has been around for more than sixty years. In the past period, the political, economic, and cyclical processes in the country have inevitably affected social work education. Considering this process, participants were asked to evaluate the status of social work education.

Looking at the responses received from the participants, it can be seen that the current situation of social work education has both positive and negative aspects. The opinions of the participants who think that the education has “positive aspects” are as follows:

“This had a positive aspect: since we were few in number, we could easily find jobs as graduates.” (Academician 1)

“Regardless of qualifications, the number of people receiving master’s and doctoral education in the field of social work has increased significantly. Besides, the publications produced by young academics have increased in number, quality and quantity and have become more visible.” (Academician 4)

“It has been seen that there is a great need for social workers in terms of the social work profession, both in the public sector and in projects supported by civil society. The training and experience that social workers have in subjects such as community organizing skills, risk assessment, identifying urgent needs and creating interventions accordingly, and crisis intervention have become more visible.” (Social Worker 4)

“In the beginning, there was an interview system in social work education and there were few students and qualified education.” (Social Worker 1)

“Social work education is carried out from a multidisciplinary perspective on the basis of knowledge-skills-value.” (Student 4)

Three of the students participating in the study talk about the benefits of the application and research courses given in the current education:

“I believe that making theoretical knowledge concrete through applications and research is an important opportunity to gain professional skills.” (Student 1)

“I think it is a great advantage that students can gain experience in many areas of social work before starting their professional lives, thanks to practice courses.” (Student 2)

“In addition, I would like to point out that the compulsory internship practices carried out in many different fields and institutions throughout the education process have a great contribution to the field.” (Student 3)

The opinions of the participants who think that the education has “negative aspects” are as follows:

“When we evaluate the current situation, unfortunately we witnessed an uncontrolled growth, and we could not stop it.” (Academician 1)

“In the current period, as a result of the uncontrolled growth, the qualitative increase is not compatible with the quantitative increase.” (Academician 4)

“Even in formal education, there is no standard undergraduate education. This was the part that we constantly noticed and were disturbed by. So, think about it, even in the exams of the most basic courses, you cannot even use an equal level measurement tool to measure the situation of the students.” (Social Worker 2)

Majority of participants emphasize that the current open education social work education is a fundamental problem. Two of them are as follows:

“I can state that the weakness of social work education in Türkiye is that social work education can be received through open education. I think that people who receive open education social work education are quite inadequate in matters such as interview techniques, writing social investigation reports, and in-depth case analysis.” (Student 2)

“I can say that the opening of open education and the decreasing quality of the existing education.” (Social Worker 3)

As can be understood from the participants' opinions, the current situation of social work education has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, application and research courses come to the fore, while on the negative side, there is the issue of open education.

Theme 2: Strengths and Weaknesses of Social Work Education

When evaluating social work education in Türkiye, it is necessary to consider the strengths and weaknesses together. In this context, the second main theme focuses on strengths and weaknesses. Participant views on the "strengths" of the education can be exemplified as follows:

"A strong point of social workers in Türkiye is that, although there is no systematic supervision, they have somehow developed the supervision system among their colleagues." (Academician 1)

"I see young academics. After more productive hands and the number of young people began to increase, the number of translated books, book chapters, books and research began to increase in the academy." (Academician 4)

"I thought I could give examples of the increasing number of departments as well as the increasing number of academics." (Academician 3)

"Universities have accreditation processes. For this reason, there are some standards they must comply with. This also improves education." (Social Worker 2)

"Another prominent issue that I see emphasized in my social work education is the emphasis on unconditional acceptance and the uniqueness of the human being. In each course, from first year to senior year, it is emphasized that each person's needs will be different, and students' professional perspectives are drawn within this framework." (Student 3)

"There is also a significant increase in the number of students who deliberately choose social work. I think this is an important thing. Maybe that can be mentioned as a strength." (Academician 2)

Participant views on the "weaknesses" of the education can be exemplified as follows:

"Currently, no matter which public institution you go to, unfortunately we do not have a system or a supervision process. This is a huge deficiency." (Academician 1)

"For its weakest aspects, this is the proliferation of education, the proliferation of training programs... Is the aim really to provide social work education or to open a department at a university? This raises the question." (Academician 3)

"Not all social service institutions are suitable for students to practice social work. We tell students to work in a group, but that is not the nature of the institution. So maybe a student does not do any groups, does not collaborate with any individuals, maybe doesn't do any community work at all." (Academician 2)

"I can point out that social work education is not offered in English as a weakness. Including academic English could have contributed to students continuing their professional development with a broader perspective." (Student 2)

"We see that our professional boundaries cannot be drawn because we do not have a professional law. For example, although a field such as school social work should

exist in Türkiye, we are still trying to explain the duties and responsibilities of the social worker.” (Student 3)

It is widely reflected in the opinions of students, academics, and social workers that the fact that social work education is given at the open education faculty is a weakness.

“There is a social work department in open education faculties, but I see it as a disadvantage that it is limited to theoretical knowledge and does not allow the acquisition of practical skills, and I think that it will directly affect the practice negatively.” (Student 1)

“I see that there are two particularly critical turning points here. The first is open education and the second is undergraduate completion.” (Academician 1)

“The opening of open education and the decreasing quality of education that currently exists.” (Social Worker 3)

Theme 3: Proficiency Level of Social Work Education

Another question asked to the participants within the study was about the adequacy of social work education in Türkiye. As can be understood from the answers, the inadequate aspects outweigh the sufficient aspects.

“When I evaluate the social work education in Türkiye from the perspective of my own university, I find it sufficient in many subjects. These are accompanied by reasons such as the high number of internships and the fact that each academician’s major is social work.” (Student 3)

“If we go specifically to the research course, while there is a finding such as big data in the world, and there is such an opportunity and new methods have emerged that can analyse big data, we see that traditional research methods and traditional analysis tools are still used in social work education.” (Academician 3)

“We say that social work is an applied discipline and profession, so this practice needs to be seen much more in the curriculum. But as you said, in most schools and departments, students start practicing late. This may cause anxiety in the student or delay the preparation for the application.” (Academician 4)

“There is a group of academics who do not follow current events, do not speak English, do not follow publications in English, and do not know new research methods. On the other hand, there are many academics who know all of these and are really trying to produce something new, and because they are trying to produce something new, they are blocked, unwanted, or not financially supported, even though they know these things and want to do them.” (Academician 2)

“I find it inadequate because there is no well-equipped training staff, and the quality of education has decreased.” (Social Worker 3)

“I think it would be more satisfying for me to be provided with the opportunity to do more case analysis and participate more in individual interviews and group studies.” (Student 1)

“I think social work education is inadequate. Basically, I think that the fact that there are many universities providing social work education has a negative impact in terms of the quality of education and selectivity among students.” (Student 2)

“I can consider the fact that there are people who have not received social work education before among the faculty members who provide social work education, as another factor that makes social work education insufficient in Türkiye.” (Student 4)

“For a professional group that basically conducts studies directly related to humans, I think that the quality and number of courses focusing on psychology, interviewing techniques, and traumas are insufficient.” (Student 3)

As can be seen, although social work education in Türkiye has lasted more than half a century, deficiencies in education and therefore in the field continue.

Theme 4: Aspects of Social Work Education that Need to be improved

It is not possible to expect both basic education and higher education to be perfect in a country. Especially a relatively new and developing discipline has many aspects that need improvement. In this context, opinions were received from the participants regarding the aspects in which social work education might need to be improved.

“For example, if the core education program were to spread throughout Türkiye. You know, they were studied meticulously, one by one, filtered through examples from different countries. Here is a program prepared with significant effort by social work academics, and as such, students in the east and the west will go through a similar process.” (Academician 2)

“You know, clear job descriptions and clear hour plans can be made. So, you still do it all, but what is the only clear thing right now? The minimum number of hours we are obliged to teach. But besides this, devoting so many hours to research, devoting so many hours to practice, supervision, administration, duties, etc. It would be better if there were clearer job descriptions.” (Academician 4)

“There should be standard education. Internship, practice hours, supervision hours... There should be equal levels of practice and supervision. All sections should be standard. All departments must have standards.” (Social Worker 2)

“I wish all students could see different internship areas, experience different educators, and get to know themselves and give direction regarding this...” (Social Worker 4)

“Social work education methods should be changed with an approach evolving towards universality.” (Social Worker 1)

“More efforts should be made to draw our professional boundaries and ensure that theoretical lessons match the experiences gained in practice. The perspective on social work in Türkiye should be examined and lessons should be shaped more according to practice.” (Student 3)

“A more equipped educational staff should be trained, and the professional definition should be clearly defined. Additionally, I find this aspect lacking as what needs to happen is explained but what needs to be done under the current conditions is not explained.” (Social Worker 3)

Updating social work education in terms of both curriculum and course content is reflected in the opinions of academics, students, and social workers:

“The point that is missing or needs improvement is curriculum design and education. I say education. So, first, I think that educators who will design the curriculum should have a new vision, knowledge, and skills.” (Academician 3)

“There are some overly critical lessons, one of which I think is gender and one of which is poverty. Courses such as human rights must be compulsory courses, not left to the student’s choice. Since these are issues that will fundamentally affect a social worker’s perspective, I think that all of these should be compulsory courses and should be taught in all universities.” (Social Worker 4)

“I believe that there are deficiencies in course content within the scope of social work education in Türkiye. I think the content of many courses is like each other. However, I believe that the courses have deficiencies in terms of the field of psychology. Adding course content such as personality theories and social psychology may be beneficial in order to be able to evaluate a case in depth, gain different perspectives, produce different solutions, and learn the source of problems.” (Student 2)

The opinions exemplified above show that social work education has many aspects that are lacking and need to be improved. Among these, issues such as curriculum, course contents, educational standards, and professional boundaries stand out.

Theme 5: The Future of Social Work Education

As mentioned in the introduction, the century we live in brings about some very rapid changes. It is obvious that many professions, whether old or new, will transform significantly in the near future. Within this main theme, participants’ expectations for the future of social work education were revealed.

It is stated by two academics that artificial intelligence, one of the most important and exciting developments of the 21st century, will affect social work education:

“Maybe it will be artificial intelligence and social work, or education and social work. It may be possible to provide education remotely and with the help of artificial intelligence, for example. Something like this may be needed.” (Academician 1)

“I am afraid whether other disciplines can play a role in social work or even take the leading role in designing the future. I think it is inappropriate to speak with a populist discourse such as some professions will die. Because we can now easily say that artificial intelligence can be used in machine learning, that is, in collaborating with the client.” (Academician 3)

Although it is difficult to predict the future of the social work profession today, some participants think that the profession will gain even more importance and value:

“I am sure that when the profession is valued more, this will of course be reflected in the academy. Because we will be expected to do more in the field, our clinical skills and macro skills will also need to be better. This is therefore something that will feed the academy.” (Social Worker 2)

“In fact, the most principal factors that will shape the answer to this question will be the policies to be implemented in the future and the atmosphere of the social structure. However, if I were to make a comment based on the course and transformation of

Türkiye's social and political structure from past to present, the need for social work professionals and therefore social work education will continue.” (Student 1)

“I believe that the presentation of social work education will be updated depending on the innovations and changes taking place in the world. At the same time, I believe that the value given to social service will increase as the need for social service increases day by day.” (Student 2)

In addition to these positive change expectations, there are also opinions that, considering the general conjuncture, the quality of education will decrease further and even the risk of closure of social work departments will increase:

“I think that the quality of education will gradually decrease and for this reason, students will turn to places where the profession is developed, that is, abroad, if they meet the language conditions.” (Social Worker 3)

“I do not think that the future of social work and social work education will be good for Türkiye. Because if there is work, students come, if there is no work, students do not come.” (Academician 2)

In addition to the aforementioned views, two academics suggest that the skill dimension will be more prominent than knowledge in the future of social work education:

“Information is okay, but how can we do it? This is what education will turn into. For example, I will not go and give lectures anymore. But I will try to provide that skill part to the student. Perhaps such software will come out that will interview the student as a client and develop that skill.” (Academician 1)

“But the important thing is to invest in the skill and value base, maybe a little more here, I guess. How the acquired knowledge can be blended with skill, what values it is related to, that is, requires a little more emphasis on the integration of knowledge with skills and values.” (Academician 3)

Based on all these views, it is possible to say that digitalization will become even more important for the future of social work education. We can predict that the political, economic, and other aspects of the country will affect the future of social work education positively or negatively.

Discussion

As a result of the questions asked to the participants in line with the purposes of the study, social work education in Türkiye was tried to be discussed from different dimensions. These views, gathered around five main themes, are discussed in the light of current literature in this section.

Although it is difficult to predict the future of not only social work but also other professions, it is possible to come across some theory and practice-based content on this subject in the literature. To illustrate, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) focuses on different scenarios for the future of social work, and four different scenarios stand out. These include (1) Adopting technology to improve

practice; (2) Building on our successes; (3) Social workers are leaders everywhere and (4) Social work leadership for a high-tech world (CSWE, 2018). Within the scenarios in question, if we think specifically about education, it can be said that the leadership of social work issues can come to the fore with the adaptation of technology to social work theories and practices. As included among the participants' answers, the following question is important for social work education in a technology-intensive future: "How might social work education prepare students for the use of technology in teaching, learning, and practise?" In terms of social work leadership, it is useful to consider the following question: "How might social work education integrate professional and interdisciplinary leadership into the curriculum to better prepare graduates for leadership roles in addressing the critical issues facing our communities and society?" The answers to these questions will be decisive for the future of social work education both locally and globally.

Reisch (2013) highlights the following characteristic situations in terms of the present and future of social work: A structural analysis of society; recognition of the significance of history, culture, and context; a synthetic and adaptive rather than rigid ideological perspective; an understanding of the interconnectedness between domestic and international issues; awareness of the role of race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation in the marginalisation of certain population. In this context, the analysis of social structure is of immense importance in terms of social work education, and it is deemed necessary to establish connections about national and international issues.

Ferguson (2017) focuses on three possible scenarios for the future of social work and social work education. The first and worst of these is the extinction of social work as a profession. The reason for this can be given as the danger of social work, which has grown especially within the welfare state, disappearing within the neoliberal system. A second and positive scenario is that the role of social work will increase, especially in providing care and shaping social policies. At this point, the increasing aging of the global population and the increasing need for more equality and social justice among the dilemmas of neoliberalism can be given as examples. The third and final scenario is that it is accepted that social work has moved away from its essence, but its role in society will be reconsidered and new practice models will be put forward. Lorenz (2017) on the other hand, argues that social work education, especially in Europe, will face a test in the next decade on the concepts of equality and extreme individualism in the face of totalitarianism, which has increased its influence after postmodernism. Considering the opinions of the participants in this study, there are opinions that social work will gradually lose its importance and that its value will increase further. Therefore, it is possible to say that the future of social work education depends on changes in social needs and the construction of new models for practice.

One of the most fundamental issues for today and the future of social work education is undoubtedly the digitalization process. At this point, participants emphasized focusing on skill training rather than knowledge, especially with artificial intelligence. Gencer and Aktan (2021) argue that the need for change in the digital age and society will also affect social work, and they discuss this process through the concept of Social Work 2.0. In this context, the question of where social

work is in digitalization becomes important, and the ability of social work education to adapt to digital environments is decisive in terms of the answer. Tuncay (2020) focuses on opportunities and obstacles in online social work education. According to him, in terms of opportunities, especially the topics of contribution to equality of opportunity and accessibility come to the fore, while in terms of obstacles, the economic context, globalization of education and technical obstacles come to mind.

Alptekin, Topuz, and Zengin (2017) in their study on the current situation of social work education in Türkiye, revealed the weaknesses and strengths of education. In the study, while the abundance of weaknesses comes to the fore, attention is drawn to problems such as the opening of too many departments in a short period, the existence of open education social work programs, and the excess of educators and students outside the field. In this study, while the issue of open education was emphasized especially by the academic participants, the issues of uncontrolled growth and extraterritoriality were also brought to the agenda. In the study of Alptekin et al., the strengths of the study are given as the potential of the increasing number of departments to provide different perspectives and the increase in the number of graduates and academic publications (2017). Sehman and Yolcuoğlu (2020) evaluated social work education in Türkiye from the perspective of open education graduates. According to the results, it was revealed that the participants felt professionally inadequate and found the supervision support inadequate. Considering that one of the prominent issues in this study is the lack of supervision in undergraduate education, this issue is seen as a common problem area in terms of both formal and distance education. Yılmaz, Koçak, and İçağasıoğlu-Çoban (2022) conducted a study that included the analysis of practice courses in social work departments. One of the most important results revealed is the lack of standard among departments in terms of practice courses. In addition, the fact that there are few or no social workers in some practice institutions is among the results revealed. In this study, social work practice is one of the topics discussed, and the participants focused mostly on the content of the practices. However, as can be seen, quality and standardization are issues that need to be emphasized as much as content.

Zengin, Alptekin, and Topuz (2023), in their study on the current situation, bottlenecks and expectations of social work education in Türkiye, focussed on the following: Overview of departments; student and alumni status; academic personnel status; curriculum and the need for indigenous knowledge; international connections and accreditation of the departments; social work education with the open education model and field practice challenges. According to the results of the research, while the negative aspects of education predominate in the current situation, the need for local knowledge and the situation of open education come to the fore. In addition, the lack of educators with a social work background, the scarcity of accredited departments, and the difficulties encountered in field applications were emphasized. Considering the results of the relevant study and the responses of the participants in this study, one of the most significant problems in terms of the current situation and near future of social work education in Türkiye seems to be the existence of open education programs. At the same time, the existence of departments that have opened uncontrollably recently and the insufficient number of educators is also remarkable in terms of the current situation.

Conclusion

The process called education consists of different stages, and the last stage of this is the higher education level. In Türkiye, as in the rest of the world, social work education is given at the undergraduate level in universities. Social work education, which has a history of approximately sixty years, has gone through different milestones and is now offered in many universities. The results of this research, which aims to capture a general picture of the current situation of social work education in Türkiye, are briefly included in this section.

Although it is considered controversial by some, today's university students are considered Generation Z. As introduced to the literature by Marc Prensky (2012), this generation is also called "digital native". Generation Z – in other words, digital natives – was born into a technology-intensive world and has been introduced to digitalization since early childhood. This being the case, they need content that uses technology intensively in their education and training processes, from pre-school education to university. A similar situation applies when it comes to social work education. Therefore, the use of digital opportunities and content for an education curriculum that keeps up to date both globally and in Türkiye is more than a necessity. In fact, it is possible to say that digitalization in education has increased after the period that started with COVID-19 pandemic. As can be understood from the relevant literature (Davis, Greenaway, Moore, & Cooper, 2019; Littlefield, 2019; NASW, ASWB, CSWE, & CSWA 2017; Kurzman, 2013; Reamer, 2013) and the results of this study, it is necessary to benefit from the driving force of artificial intelligence in social work education. It seems that not only artificial intelligence but also skill training will become more important than knowledge transfer in this century.

To summarize the points reached through the main themes within the aims of the research and research questions:

- Negative aspects and deficiencies stand out in the current situation of social work education in Türkiye. In particular, the existence of open education programs, the uncontrolled growth of departments and the shortage of qualified instructors come to the fore.
- When we look at the strengths and weaknesses of social work education, the increase in young academics and Turkish publications stand out in terms of strengths, while the lack of a supervision system and the lack of standardization of social work practices stand out in terms of weaknesses.
- Inadequacies predominate in terms of the adequacy level of social work education. While some of the student participants emphasize competence in their own universities, most participants point out the inadequacy of education in terms of both the curriculum, keeping up to date, and the teaching staff and quality.
- When we look at the aspects of social work education that need to be improved, the need for standardization in education prevails in many aspects. There is also an emphasis on making the curriculum and content more universal.

- When looking at the results for the future of social work education in Türkiye, it can be seen that there are both positive and negative expectations. On the positive side, there is the idea that the need for the profession will increase, while on the negative side, there is concern that the quality of education will decrease and even the risk of closure of departments is expressed.

This study shows that education is a phenomenon that should be evaluated multidimensionally and holistically. It should be noted that this study, in which the current situation and the future of social work education in Türkiye is evaluated from the perspectives of academics, students, and social workers, is limited to the opinions of the participants. In future studies on the subject, the opinions of participants who teach in social work departments but do not have a social work background can be obtained. It is thought that a study based on the experiences of educators and students teaching in open education programs will make a significant contribution to the literature.

Acknowledgments

The results of this research were presented by the author as a paper at the International Conference on Research in Education and Science (ICRES) session held between 18-21 May 2023.

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