

Job Future Plans of Social Work Students – Discussion on the Direction for Improving Social work program

Nguyen Trung Hai¹

Abstract

The profession of Social Work has developed substantially over recent decades, contributing to the social welfare development of the country. However, summary reports also indicate that the human resources in Social Work still need to be enhanced in both quantity and quality. The current human resources in Social Work includes existing staff and new staff (new graduates/students) recruited to work at the facility. While the capacity of the existing staff depends on experience and short-term training courses, the capacity of the new staff/Students depends largely on the social work program at the training schools. A good and effective social work program depends on many factors, in which a social work program that closely follows the needs and job future plan of students is particularly important. Therefore, understanding the future plans of social work students after graduation is crucial for guiding the social work programs. Using in-depth interview method with 05 students and 03 leaders of social work recruitment agencies, and questionnaire method with the sample size consisted of 152 students selected from a list of 200 third and fourth-year social work students after graduation, this paper focuses on analyzing aspects such as: Plans for further education, plans for supplementary knowledge, job plans, and workplace preferences. The results show that many students do not intend to pursue further studies in the near future, plan to learn additional foreign languages, seek employment in government agencies, and work in their trained specialization. These findings help to guide improvements in social work programs and enhance teaching methods and content accordingly.

Keywords: *Job future plans, students, social work, program.*

Introduction

Social work is a new profession that has been officially recognized by Vietnam through Decision 32/QD-TTg dated March 25, 2010 of the Prime Minister: Approving the Project on development of social work profession for the period 2010 - 2020 and Decision 112/QD-TTg dated January 22, 2021 of the Prime Minister: Issuing the Program on development of social work for the period 2021 - 2030. Through the development process, the profession of social work has increasingly proven its importance in intervening in social issues and ensuring human security. However, through assessment, the effectiveness in the fields of social work intervention has not yet been as expected and one of the main reasons is that the capacity of the staff in this field is still limited (Department of Social Protection, 2023). The current staff working in the field of social work includes existing staff and new staff (new graduates/students) recruited to work at the facility.

Preliminary assessment in the report of the Ministry of Education and Training (2023) shows that students still face certain difficulties in their work after graduation. Results in research and scientific seminars also show that social work students are enthusiastic and dynamic, but practical knowledge and experience in working with clients still need to be learned more. Papers and reports in the scientific yearbook of the Ministry of Education (2023) also show that the social work training programs of the schools still need to be adjusted to be more suitable to reality; closer to the needs of students to help students achieve their career plans after graduation. Thus, innovating the training program associated with students' plans to graduate is a very necessary research direction in both the field of training and developing high-quality human resources.

¹ Social Work faculty, University of Labor and Social Affairs, Hanoi, Vietnam; hainguyentrung1979@gmail.com; haint79@ulsa.edu.vn (corresponding author).

Research Methodology

Interview Method Using Questionnaires

A questionnaire was used to investigate the future plans of social work students. The sample size consisted of 152 students selected from a list of 200 third and fourth-year social work students.

In-Depth Interview Method

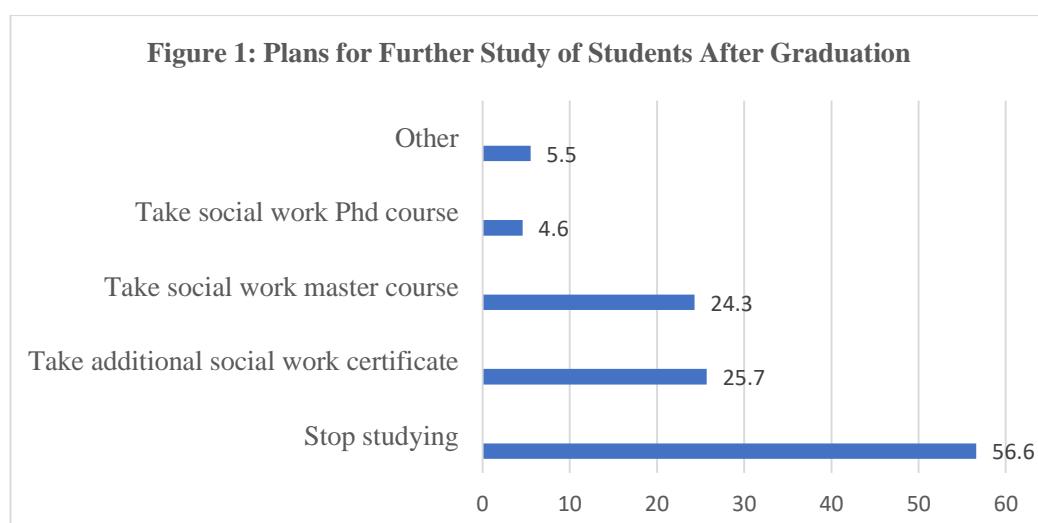
An in-depth interview method was used to interview 05 students and 03 leaders of social work recruitment agencies to understand the plans of social work students and improvement directions to meet their expectations.

Document Analysis Method

Document analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the theories and principles related to the research topic. Specifically, the study will examine legal texts, policies, and regulations regarding intentions, careers, and the recruitment of social work students. Additionally, the article will analyze training programs, course outlines, and related materials.

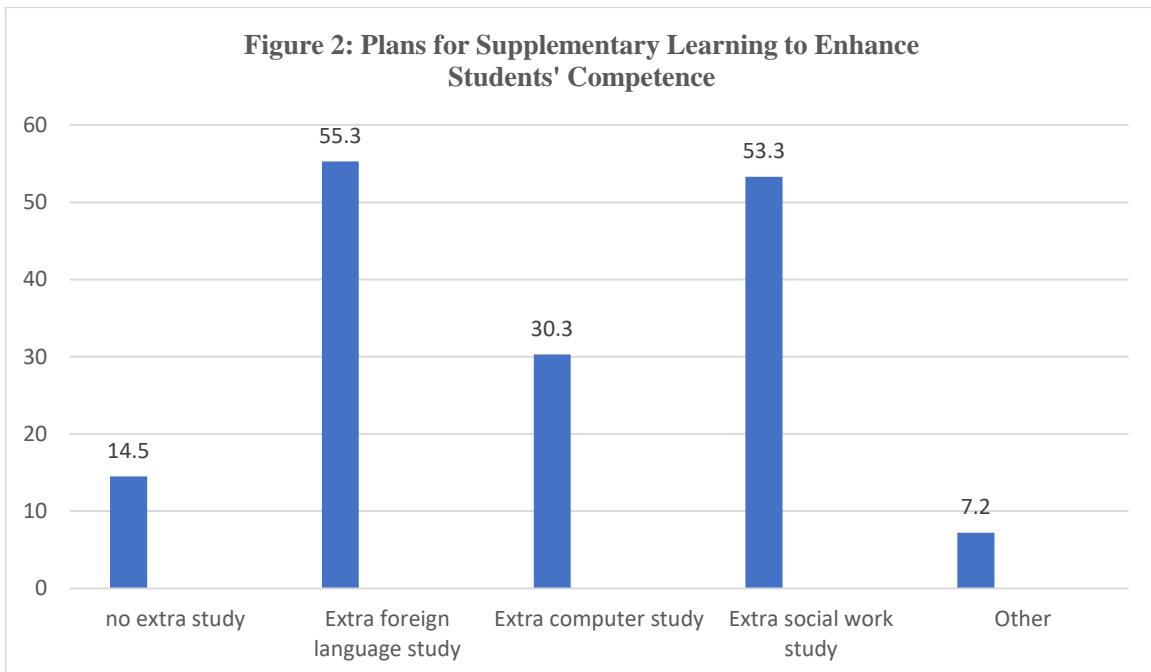
Research Results

Investigating the current academic year of social work students at the university, the survey results show that the majority of surveyed social work students are in their third year (accounting for 64.5%). The proportion of fourth-year social work students participating in the survey is smaller (35.5%). These students have completed basic courses, prerequisite courses, and have participated or are currently participating in practical activities, alternative courses or preparing to write their graduation theses.



The survey on the intention to pursue further studies among students after graduating from university shows that about 24.3% of students plan to continue with a master's degree. This indicates a relatively high number, approximately one-fourth of students, will continue to develop their academic path at a higher level to enhance their professional qualifications, develop their skills, and reflect their desire for personal growth. This is seen as a positive sign for the social work sector regarding the quality of human resources with high professional qualifications in the future. Additionally, 25.7% of students plan to pursue additional certificates related to social work to deepen their knowledge in specific areas of social work assistance or to meet the requirements of service providers in developing the social work workforce. Conversely, a significant proportion of students (56.6%) do not intend to pursue any further studies after graduation. This encompasses various reasons related to personal and family circumstances, as well as issues concerning the career development needs and orientation of students. Therefore, at present, many surveyed students have no plans to develop professionally beyond trying to complete their training program and graduating.

Furthermore, the survey results indicate that 5.5% of total students have other plans regarding their fields of study and career orientations in the future. They may pursue specialized knowledge and skills through studying abroad or consider learning other subjects to supplement their current studies in social work or align better with their interests and abilities.



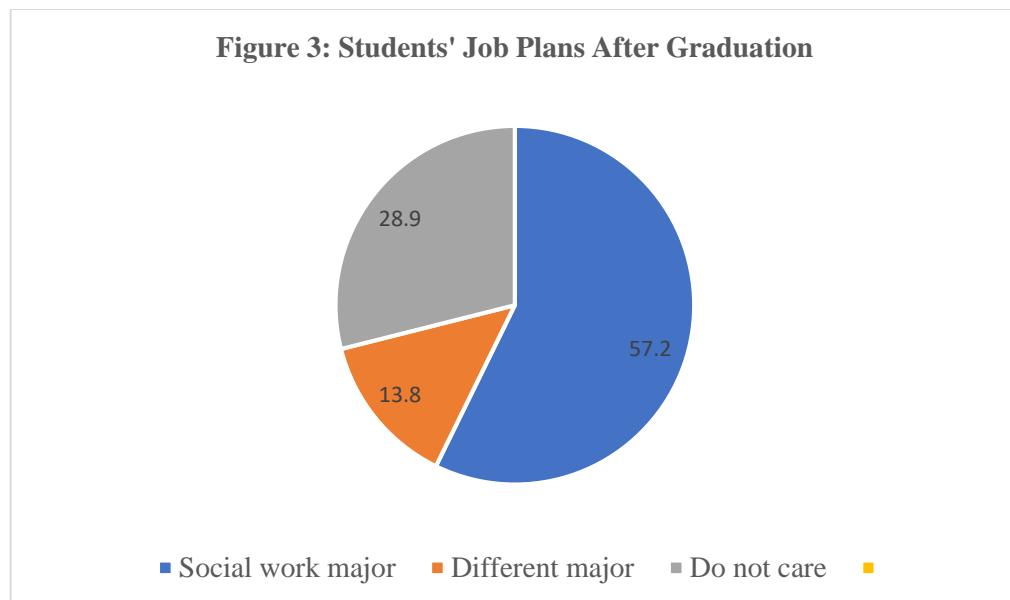
The results obtained from the survey concerning the content of enhancing the competence and qualifications of social work students indicate that over 50% of students choose self-study as a method to improve their social work knowledge (53.3%) and participate in language enhancement courses to meet the graduation requirements. This also ensures better alignment with the increasing demands of society in many fields (55.3%). Currently, in Vietnam, many international organizations operate in areas related to social work. To meet the job requirements at these organizations, social work employees must not only strive to develop deep professional knowledge in the organization's operational field but also acquire foreign language skills (primarily English), which are essential. Meeting these requirements will provide workers with opportunities to continue learning, develop their professional expertise, gain more confidence in their work, and acquire better opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.

In addition to self-improvement in foreign language skills, about 30.3% of students also intend to participate in courses to enhance their computer skills. This aligns well with the practical requirements of many jobs in the fourth industrial revolution era. The demands for computer skills are not only at the elemental but at increasingly higher levels across various fields. For social work students, information technology skills not only assist them in searching for and utilizing information and data for their studies and completing course requirements but also serve as a tool for their internship process and graduation report. Notably, to serve their future work process, applying computer technology to personal work management as well as client records management is an indispensable task for a social worker. Technology will help social work employees manage client records according to the required job standards, while also helping to systematize and ensure the scientific rigor in the work of not only each individual social worker but also in the management of general activities of each agency and organization. The information system for the organization's activities, as well as the management record system for clients needs to be managed scientifically and logically, combining both coded records and traditional paper documents to ensure sufficient information and evidence for organization's activities. Moreover, the useful applications of information technology also assist in effectively serving the management and operational direction of the leaders of social work service agencies.

However, despite most students having plans to enhance their professional knowledge in social work, as well as their computer and language skills to meet current educational demands and future recruitment needs, about 14.5% of students currently do not intend to further their study in any mentioned fields. This may be due to their perception of the necessity of enhancing their capabilities or because they are considering shifting to fields that do not require significant improvement in social work, language, and computer skills.

Notably, 7.2% of students plan to enhance their competence and qualifications in other fields. This depends on various factors, including personal conditions, needs, interests, and future career orientations of each student. This rate reflects a significant number of students who are proactively

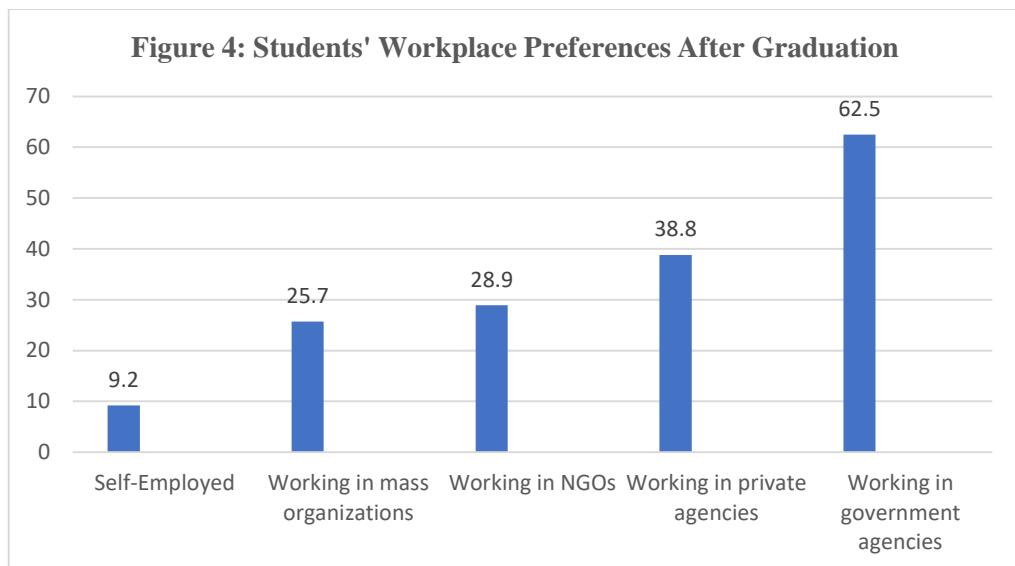
preparing to enhance their skills to flexibly meet job market demands and improve their job-seeking abilities in the future. Currently, many students are studying two majors simultaneously or studying one major before another for a period of time in order to shorten the time needed to achieve their academic goals and maximize their time and academic abilities.



Investigating students' job aspirations after graduation, the research team found that about 57.2% of students wish to find jobs related to their social work specialization after graduating. This indicates that the majority of students in the social work program, after their studies and training, wish to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in practice to assist social work clients. This is a legitimate desire aligned with the general mindset of most students who have chosen to study, train and commit to a particular field. The survey results also demonstrate the effectiveness of the training activities of the social work program at the University of Labor – Social Affairs for its students. The specialized knowledge, pedagogical methods, sense of responsibility, enthusiasm, and affection of the teaching staff towards social work students are crucial factors influencing students' efforts in their studies as well as their determination to pursue and commit to their profession after graduation.

The survey results also indicate that 13.8% of social work students wish to find jobs outside the social work field after graduation. Investigating this further, the research team identified several reasons: (i) Lack of career guidance during high school; the chosen field of study does not align with the students' interests and needs; (ii) Other subjective and objective factors from students during their studies and upon graduation: the desire to have an additional job outside social work to satisfy their passion or to earn extra income; the demand for other jobs is growing and aligns with the current conditions of students; (iii) Influences from students' families: changing career aspirations for their children to better match their family's current circumstances; (iv) The diverse and flexible transition trends in the development of new professions in society...

Notably, 28.9% of students respond that it is not important for them to find a job related to their social work specialization after graduation. This may reflect several reasons, such as: the commitment and determination of these students towards the social work profession is still not high; they have not received sufficient motivation or influence to pursue this career; external factors such as family, relatives, and friends; and the influence of demand for other professions in society... Additionally, this survey results highlight another aspect: a significant number of social work students, like many young people today, are very dynamic, adaptable, and capable of seeking and responding to various fields and jobs according to current societal needs.



The survey on students' workplace preferences after graduating from the social work program reveals that the majority of students wish to work in government agencies. This includes both state management units and public service units - accounting for 62.5%. Explaining this number, a representative from 01 recruitment agency stated: "The desire of students to work in government agencies after graduation may stem from factors such as: Opportunities for further training and career advancement; Stable income; High job security; Suitable working conditions for themselves and their families; Preferential policies; The prestige of the agency; and Family tradition in the profession... Although there are currently many job opportunities for graduates in various types of social work service providers, government agencies remain a popular choice among many social work students." (Quote from in-depth interview: Mrs. Đ.T.M.T – Representative of 01 recruitment agency)

Along with the majority of participated students wanting to work in government agencies after graduation, there is also a relatively high percentage of students (38.8%) who wish to work in private sector organizations. This significant percentage indicates that many students desire a dynamic, flexible work environment with fewer restrictions, and generally offers salaries that can better meet their living needs. Furthermore, due to the less constrained nature of this work environment, employees have opportunities to engage in additional activities to increase their income, satisfying their needs and interests while learning professional skills in social work and other fields.

The survey results also indicate that around 28.9% of students aspire to work in international organizations after graduation. This can be seen as a positive sign for social work students as it reflects their confidence, adaptability, and willingness to learn and strive to meet the demands of working in an international environment. In this context, besides the demands for high professional qualifications in specific fields, good language and computer skills, it is also necessary to have the ability to adapt and be sensitive to the working environment and particular culture of each organization. However, the participants in the survey on this topic are third-year and fourth-year students. These are students who have not yet graduated and still have some courses that are incomplete, as well as some courses they have not yet been exposed to. Therefore, to enhance their chances of working in their specialized fields within international organizations, students need to make significant efforts to strengthen their skills while still studying, gather information, and prepare the necessary conditions to meet the recruitment requirements of their target organizations. Especially, they need to possess the resilience and capability to work in high-pressure environments, which also offer many opportunities for learning and development.

In addition to the majority of students wishing to work in government agencies and international organizations, there are also about 25.7% of students hope to work in associations and social organizations after graduation. This percentage opens up potential for human resources in social work at local levels to directly assist vulnerable groups needing support in the community. Moreover, this group represents the workforce within the network of social work professionals who can connect, collaborate, and support each other to effectively fulfill their responsibilities and provide timely assistance to social work clients.

A small number of students participating in the survey wish to open their social work service facilities after graduation (approximately 9.2%). This percentage can be considered significant when we consider that these are new graduates facing numerous challenges and limitations in terms of expertise and social experience. This also indicates that a considerable number of current social work students have prepared their mindset, determination, and passion for social work. In reality, the number of social work service facilities, both public and private, is still insufficient to meet the diverse needs of a enormous number of clients requiring assistance. Thus, students who wish to establish their social work service providers can be seen as a positive highlight, promising to provide additional resources for vulnerable groups in need of assistance, allowing them to find appropriate support to address their diverse issues and complex needs. Achieving this goal requires students not only to have good academic results but also to have strategy to develop deep expertise in specific areas of social work, such as: psychological counseling, health care support at home and in facilities for clients like drug addicts, disabled individuals, the elderly, and those with mental health issues in the community, and children in difficult circumstances... Especially, students must acquire knowledge and undergo processes of researching and learning about the models as well as the procedures/formalities for establishing and managing social work service facilities in the future.

Discussion on improving social work programs

The social work undergraduate program aims to provide basic capacity building in the field of social work for students so that they can grasp general knowledge and understanding in this field. However, when it comes to working in depth with target groups, this basic training reveals limitations (Baikady, 2025). Therefore, in addition to general training programs, there is also a need for specialized social work programs that train in specific fields to meet the needs of society (Nguyen, T. T. H. 2021). For example, the specialized program of Social Work Services in Elderly Care or the school social work program are both fields that are of interest to society.

Accumulating basic knowledge and skills of the profession in a context where society is always changing diversely and rapidly also requires social work students to be flexible, highly adaptable and, above all, they need to have a strong belief and love for the social work profession (Sunil, 2024). Thus, in addition to courses such as Introduction to Social Work or Social Work Ethics, students need to have practical experience with the profession. Therefore, the program can add a Social Work Internship course so that students can experience, observe and initially build passion and commitment to the social work profession.

In the study, students majoring in Social Work were equipped with basic knowledge of Social Work, equipped with skills and methods to implement activities in practice through practical exercises in class and in the reality of practice and internship activities. However, Eileen (2015) believes that in order to help students be more confident when participating in the labor market, the courses need to be more closely linked to practice (Eileen, 2015). Agreeing with the above viewpoint, Nguyen, T. T. L., & Nguyen, T. T. H. (2018) proposed that to help students be able to work immediately after graduation, the training program needs to have at least 30-40% of practical courses in the specialized knowledge block. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to increase the number of credits for practical courses at the facility by 3 or 4 credits. As for the classroom courses in the social work program, it is also possible to invite practical staff to share and exchange in class with students to improve knowledge and practical skills.

In addition, like other professions in society, solid specialized knowledge is an extremely important factor, but to help students become more confident, they also need to equip themselves with many other soft skills (Nguyen, T. H. L. 2023). Practice shows that soft skills help students improve their learning efficiency, teamwork, communication and adaptation to new environments, while expanding career opportunities after graduation (Nguyen, T. T. 2017). Thus, the program can add more modules such as creative skills, personal development skills; entrepreneurship skills... In addition, soft skills can be integrated into other modules through diverse teaching methods such as exercises, brainstorming questions to improve critical thinking ability; project exercises, discussions to improve problem exploration skills and interactive presentations... (Nguyen, T. H. L. 2023). Improving the applicability of soft skills can also be done through lecturers creating conditions for students to proactively seek and learn from their families and social relationships.

The value of social work is to help students work and support people with diverse cultures (Benjamin, 2023). The goal of the training program is also to help students improve their capacity to integrate internationally, so the training program also needs to focus more on English courses in some

social work subjects. In addition, it is possible to add more English learning materials for students to refer to. Organizing English clubs or groups so that students have a playground and an English learning environment is both to improve their level to help them meet output standards and later help them have more opportunities in work.

The training program, especially the course outline, needs to be updated regularly according to the needs of society (Nguyen, T. T. L. 2017). In particular, the program needs to closely follow the new policies of Vietnam as well as the requirements or regulations of public and non-public service providers because these are the two main workplaces that students desire. Teaching and learning methods in the classroom also need to be applied flexibly, focusing on students in order to not only equip them with knowledge but also improve soft skills in communication and behavior when working in diverse environments.

Conclusion

The Resolution on breakthroughs in education and training development (Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW in 2025) emphasized: Education and training must ensure "learning goes hand in hand with practice", "theory is closely linked to practice", "school is closely linked to society". In practice, training must always be student-centered, closely following the needs of students. Therefore, research to clarify students' employment plans after graduation to adjust training programs is a top priority in Social Work institutions. Research results show that Social Work programs need to add more practical content in the modules (not just the internship module). Knowledge about client groups through practical experiences also needs to be enhanced and continuously updated. In addition, updating foreign information and knowledge is also necessary to be added to the courses in the social work program, thereby helping students improve their capacity and ability to find suitable jobs in the future.

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