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Alaa Zuhir Al Rawashdeh

Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, UAE \\ Humanities and Social Sciences Research Center (HSSRC), Ajman University, Ajman, UAE \\ Department of Social Sciences, Al Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordan, alaa_rwashdeh@yahoo.com

Asma Rebhi Al Arab

Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, UAE \\ Humanities and Social Sciences Research Center (HSSRC), Ajman University, Ajman, UAE \\ Department of Social Sciences, Al Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordan, alaa_rwashdeh@yahoo.com

Mooza Isa Aldoy

Department of Social Sciences, University of Bahrain, Bahrain, alaa_rwashdeh@yahoo.com

Salah Gad

Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, UAE \\ Humanities and Social Sciences Research Center (HSSRC), Ajman University, Ajman, UAE, alaa_rwashdeh@yahoo.com

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The Potential Problems that Affect Practical Training of University Students: A Preliminary Cross-Sectional Study

Alaa Zuhir Al Rawashdeh^{1,2,3,*}, Asma Rebhi Al Arab^{1,2,3}, Mooza Isa Aldoy⁴, and Salah Gad^{1,2}

¹Department of Sociology, College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, Ajman, UAE

²Humanities and Social Sciences Research Center (HSSRC), Ajman University, Ajman, UAE

³Department of Social Sciences, Al Balqa Applied University, Salt, Jordan

⁴Department of Social Sciences, University of Bahrain, Bahrain

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Abstract: This study aimed to identify the most important problems faced by students in the field of training. The problems addressed are limited to academic, organizational, guidance, and fieldwork institutions. The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional design to identify the difficulties experienced by students during specialization in sociology and Social Work. The study was conducted in media and humanities College at Ajman University. A random-sampling technique was used to recruit 130 male and female students enrolled in the academic year 2019-2020. The data was collected using 4-Point Likert scale questionnaire survey form and the collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences version 22.0. Descriptive Statistical Analysis test was applied and represented through frequency and percentages whereas other findings were represented by arithmetic mean and standard deviation. Results indicated that majority of respondents were moderately satisfied with the level of performance of the faculty member in charge of training. Major lacking was in the form of unavailability of supervisors, insufficient resources and skilled trainers. It is recommended to select training institutions with the right potential to succeed the training process in terms of the appropriate capacity and adequate preparations for the reception of students. The study provides important information regarding the challenges met by students while conducting education in social work. Though training serves as an integral part of social work in the specialization of sociology, the remaining process of education depends upon the knowledge and skills of trainers that may cater challenges during the practical journey

Keywords: Ajman University, Challenges, Field Training, Social work.

1 Introduction

The specialization of sociology requires training that contains theoretical knowledge that is provided in educational institutions and field-based areas. Social work trainings are based on different educational viewpoints and their practical implications. Field work, which is also referred as field guidance, field related education or field instruction is important for course completion [1]. The field work involves the utilization of different theories that are related to social systems and human behavior under certain situations. Social work mediates its focus toward areas where individuals connect with their environment. Management and security of human rights and social equity are key considerations of this field [2].

The specialization in sociology depends upon the final part of the project that is mainly based on the practical implication of the idea, as happens in field working.

Thampi (2017) emphasized that field education serves as the integral part of social work education, where students are free to imply their theoretical knowledge over different situations to solve client concerns [3]. The field curriculum is designed under the supervision of highly skilled, trained, qualified and experienced staff. This helps students in demonstrating their exceptional skills in the open environment. However, the accomplishment in every field is highly dependent on the interpersonal skills of students, compatibility of educational institutions and individuals' willingness [4].

Filed work training is an important segment that is used to prepare students for practicing genuine social work. This includes taking care of cases with the direction and supervision of prepared fieldworkers for the fulfillment of individual social responsibilities. Field work includes various difficulties, which incorporate individual instabilities and competency issues, inquiries regarding field instructors and associates, fears about gathering with customers followed by the central aim of the intended

*Corresponding author-mail: alaa_rwashdeh@yahoo.com

action. Individuals including field administrators and social teachers mainly focuses on the student's involvement in field work related activities to provide them the practical experience of the theoretical knowledge [5].

Tanga (2013) indicated that field work is an area of studies to strengthen and raise conscious level in community to make theory and practice parallel to each other. The successful implementation of social work practices is often incomplete with the in-depth understanding of the field and its basic requirements. This however is only possible through the completion of essential theoretical and practical knowledge regarding the fundamental importance of field work in sociology [6]. Onyiko et al (2017) indicated that social work training and social work calling offers a changed planning at numerous levels. Training is accessible at each instructive level ranging from junior i.e. college level to highest level of doctorate.

The practical implementation of sociology and its various aspects require an in-depth understanding of the most complex problems prevailing in society. Mutual cooperation is the fundamental need of sociology, since no social working task can be successfully implemented without the understanding of prevailing societal issues that are being suppressed by oppressive parties of the present age. Gehlert et al (2017) discussed the idea in similar perspective, according to which individuals including both trainers and academicians need to develop a strong communication network, that includes; timely collaboration with individuals belonging to other disciplines, such as practitioners and policy makers. Challenges that obstruct the successful implementation of the plan can only be catered through the combined efforts of parties, where individuals from every other field possessing different social and political knowledge may contribute in mitigating the prevailing challenges during the processing phase of social work plans[7] .

The most prominent challenges that are often encountered during the field work includes a conflict between individual personal and social understanding of the infused cultural and social values. Since most of the training in sociology occurs within the restricted boundaries, learners lack the ability to absorb or function in accordance to the field environment. This emphasizes the value of the practical curriculum that includes the experimental exposure of academicians towards different values, perspectives, theories and procedures involved in other disciplines. It further directs the idea towards the concept of transdisciplinary training that is used to expand the learner's area of knowledge for successful working during field work (James et al. 2014). One significant type of such activity includes the elevator speeches, which is an activity used to demonstrate different area of interest within the field [8].

Another important challenge that is often encountered during field work includes the alignment of family preservation and social work practices. The implementation

of such an effort requires complete knowledge related to the skills, and values that are most suitable in the practical action of family preservation. Maluccio (2017) outlined that family preservation services are possible when students are aware of the essential contents related to the combined skills, values and the opportunities available for students for family preservation [9]. Liu et al. (2013) indicated that field education programs are usually developed through the cooperation of universities that provides the background knowledge of the idea and support students through reaccreditation and the reporting process. Raskin et al. (2008) provided an important stance in this regard, according to which the orientation related to the field management programs are practiced and reconstructed depending upon the fundamental needs of the social world. The incorporation of different planning is held through the experienced or inexperienced challenges in the field work program. A significant consideration has been provided to these challenges as they serve as the foremost opportunity for individuals to reflect over the idea of social work education and the importance of field work [10]. Rehn & Kalman (2018) mentioned the idea in terms of Australian praxis and praxis that involves repeated practices and experiences of social work to attain the practical wisdom of the idea. Students and teachers that are associated to the field of sociology need to understand the essential requirement of exchanged thought process, as well as its relationship with service user situation [11].

Bogo (2015) demonstrated that field instructions create a huge impact over the quality of social projects and prosperity of the society [12]. Field work serves as the major asset in development of students as social workers. A significant amount of studies (Ayala et al. 2018; [13] Bogo et al. 2015; [12] David. 2019[14]) have been conducted related to the idea that emphasizes the value of field work, supervision and the role of effective curriculum in preparing students for future challenges. However, there still lies the need to study the idea with another perspective that addresses the gaps found in previous studies. The above literature indicates a comprehensive understanding regarding the different issues that are considerable in the social work education. A detailed description regarding the developments in the given area is provided to identify the gap found in previous studies. As indicated through above mentioned review, that several studies have identified the value of social work and the associated challenges in this field of education. The idea however is still not addressed in the context of educational institutions of UAE. Therefore, the present study caters the lacking found in previous studies to examine and assess students' perceptions along with different challenges that they face during the social work educational process.

The study is significant as it specifically focuses on the problems and challenges that are commonly faced by students during the specialization of sociology in Ajman University of UAE. The contributions of this study are valuable for both academicians and social trainers, as the

study outlines various challenges that needed to be catered in order to prepare quality social workers. The deficiencies found in the sociology curriculum and the patterns involved in field training can be addressed easily. Since this study addresses a wide range of knowledge related to the idea, therefore, educational institutions globally may attain greater advantages in this regard. Policy makers of both educational institutions and field trainers may attain advantage from this study to develop flexible approaches for attaining objectives related to the field of sociology. Thus, the study is essential in emphasizing the use of modernized approaches that may help in mitigating challenges that are encountered during specialization in sociology and field work.

Research Questions

Based on the aim of the study the following research questions have been formulated.

Q1. What are the major difficulties faced by students during the field training in sociology?

Q2. What are the major obstacles at organizational level that obstruct the expansion of knowledge in social work?

Q3. What are the main problems that are related to the field of sociology?

2 Methodologies

Study Design

A descriptive cross-sectional design is used for identifying the difficulties that are experienced by students during the specialization of sociology. The rationale for the use of this approach is based on its efficacy to draw comprehensive and concrete results.

Study Setting

The study was carried out at the media and humanities College at Ajman University. The research setting is based on its relevance to the determined research topic, facilitating the accomplishment of relevant and concrete results. Moreover, this research setting is familiar to the study participants, which helps them in responding to the research queries in a comfortable manner.

Study Population and Sample

The study population constitutes of students enrolled in the field training courses at Ajman University. This included the sociology and Social Work course and the field training courses, as these students can best accommodate the determined objective of the study. A random sampling technique is used to select 130 male and female 30 students enrolled in first semester of the academic year 2019 to 2020 at Ajman University. Data were gathered from the admission and registration department of the university by sending in an application which requested the administration and registration details of the students at Ajman University. According to Rao soft online calculator the recommended sample size was 109 with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

The inclusion criteria are also based on students belonging to the first semester of the specialization course. Students with incomplete knowledge related to the field were excluded. The reason for determining the selection criteria is to assess the difficulties faced by the students initially. Based on the determined criteria, data were collected from 30 students. The use of this sampling technique was based on its effectiveness for drawing results that can be generalized across the different population and in a different setting, improving the value of the derived results.

Data Collection

For the analysis of the difficulties of field training, a social survey of the students was conducted. A close-ended questionnaire was used for collecting the data with every item marked on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1) Strongly agree 2- Agree 3-Strongly Disagree 4- Disagree. The questionnaire was based on two parts. The first part includes the demographic details of the participants such as; participant's age, nationality, marital status, residency, employment status, and field of training. Whereas, the second part involves questions related to the difficulties encountered in the field training. This section of the questions involved further sub sections to investigate respondents' perspectives regarding the social work education in organizations, indicative difficulties during the learning process, problems associated to learning organization and field training institutions. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, the researcher examined it for its validity and reliability. Hundred and Fifty 32 forms were distributed, out of which 140 were received. Out of 140 forms 10 were discarded as they were incomplete so the final sample size of the study was 130. Questionnaires were physically handed to the students and supervised under the course in-charge.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22. Descriptive statistical test was used for the analysis of the collected data, where findings were represented through different frequency and percentages. Other important findings were presented by using arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

Reliability and Validity of the questionnaire

The questionnaire reliability was checked through Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The value for all the items of the questionnaire was above 0.7 which deems it fit for the current study. Moreover, the validity was ensured by its review and analysis by 4 experts such as two language specialist and two field training specialist. These experts review the content of the questionnaire and assessed its clarity and understanding for the students for collecting the relevant and correct data. The changes in the content were made based on the provided feedback, which led to deletion, addition, and improvisation of some content.

Ethical Consideration

A written study proposal and a copy of the sample size was shared with the Institute Review Board (IRB) of the University for seeking their permission for this research. The objectives and the context of the study were communicated to the participants prior to data collection process. Confidentiality of participants personal data were also maintained throughout the process.

3 Results

This section demonstrates the important finding related to the types of difficulties faced by different students of the Ajman University of Social Work in UAE, while conducting education specialization in sociology.

overall respondents, 70% respondents were female while 30% were male. Most of the participants belonged to the age group between 21-23 years (61.5%), whereas only 11.5% of respondents belonged to the age groups 24-26 and above 27 years. Other important details are related to individuals' nationality. According to the findings (70%) were Emirati, (19.2%) were Arabs and (26.9%) belonged to gulf countries. Practical status of the respondents showed that, (57.6%) respondents were unemployed and (42.3%) respondents were employed. Most of the recruited participants were married (38.46%), others were single (34.61%), separated (15.38%), widow (7.69%) and divorced (3.8%).

Table 1: Demographic Details of Participants.

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Males	39	30%
Female	91	70%
Age		
18-20 years	20	15.3%
21-23 years	80	61.5%
24-26 years	15	11.5%
Above 27 years	15	11.5%
Nationality		
Emirati	70	53.8%
Gulf	35	26.9%
Arabic	25	19.2%
Others	0	-
Academic Performance		
Excellent	85	65.3%
Very good	25	19.2%
Good	20	15.3%
Acceptable	0	0%
Practical status		
Employed	55	42.3%
Unemployed-	75	57.69%
Status		
Married	50	38.46%
Single	45	34.61%
Widow	10	7.69%
Divorced	5	3.8%
Separate	20	15.38%
Field of training		
Family	35	26.92%
Social Defense	25	19.23%
The elderly	15	11.53%
Social Affairs	30	23.07%
Others (Police, School or Hospital)	25	19.23%

The findings are presented in the form of descriptive statistics to provide the mean values of the most commonly related challenges among students. Table 1 provides the demographic details of the recruited participants. Out of the

Table 2 provides information related to different themes that are developed depending upon the difficulties faced by students through different sources. Findings

indicated the mean value of 3.38 ± 3.425 for guidance difficulties. The lowest mean value i.e. 3.224 ± 0.707 was attained for organizational problems and other values include 3.3166 ± 0.676 and 3.3364 ± 0.898 for problems related to field training institutions and total tools respectively.

faculty members, whereas, lowest mean value 3.20 was attained for the statement ‘We learn inside the classroom through collaborative learning and facilitate field training’. However, the availability ratio for all questions was said to be ‘Medium’.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics.

Themes	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank	Impact Level
Axis of academic difficulties	3.38	0.6857	1	Medium
Guidance difficulties	3.425	0.7256	2	Medium
Organizational Problems	3.224	0.7073	3	Medium
Problems related to field training institutions	3.3166	0.6769	4	Medium
Total tool	3.3364	0.8985	5	Medium

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Respondent’s Perceptions Related to Social work Education.

Questions	Mean Value	St. Deviation	Ranking	Level of Impact
The number of subjects I study in the social service axis is appropriate for me in quantitative term	3.33	0.54667	1	Medium
We learn inside the classroom through collaborative learning and facilitate field training	3.20	.84690	2	Medium
The number of daily hours in the training program is appropriate for the content of the subjects I study at the university and appropriate	3.26	.86834	3	Medium
I feel good about the performance of the faculty member	3.56	.50401	4	Medium
In terms of quality	3.46	.68145	5	Medium
The training program is an appropriate qualification program for my specialization	3.46	.62881	6	Medium
The faculty member is keen to use the full time of the lecture as useful	3.40	.72397	7	Medium

Table 4 provide descriptive values for respondent’s perceptions related to indicative difficulties during the learning process. Results showed the highest mean value 4.6 for ‘The academic advisor follows the course of the training program throughout the training period’ with high availability level. Whereas, lowest mean value 3.1 was

attained for ‘The academic advisor is available during the office hours for academic guidance’ with medium availability. Other high values of availability levels were achieved for ‘Good relationship with academic advisor’ with a mean value of 3.5.

Table 3 provides respondents’ perceptions regarding the social work education. Findings of the study indicated highest mean value i.e. 3.56 for good performance of

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Respondent's Perceptions Related to Indicative Difficulties in Learning Process (Ranking in Descending Order).

Questions	Mean Values	St. Deviation	Ranking	Level of Impact
The academic advisor helps me solve the problems I face during the training	3.2	0.71438	1	Medium
The academic advisor gives me details of the training program plan since the beginning of the semester	3.2	0.73030	2	Medium
The academic advisor is available during the office hours for academic guidance	3.1	0.75886	3	Medium
Good relationship with academic advisor	3.5	0.505855	4	High
The academic advisor follows the course of the training program throughout the training period	4.6	7.46702	5	High
The academic advisor provides maturity and guidance during the training period	3.3	0.65126	6	Medium
The academic advisor prepares me for the training program	3.2	0.71438	7	Medium
There are clear guidelines and lists showing me the distribution of the training program	3.3	0.65126	8	Medium
Axis as a whole	3.425	1.5241		Medium

Table 5 provides information regarding respondents' views about the organizational difficulties during the learning process. Findings indicated the highest mean value of 3.30 for the following statements respectively; 'Officials are keen to achieve student satisfaction through the services provided to them by the training program' (medium), 'There are appropriate breaks during the course' (high), 'The delay or absence from the application of the training program does not contribute to the development of my practical capabilities' (medium). In contrast to this, lowest mean value 2.96 is attained for 'A convenient place for meals is available during the training program' with medium availability level.

Results provided in table 6 show descriptive values for respondent's perceptions regarding organizational difficulties in field training. The highest mean value of 3.5 is attained for 'Lack of competence of specialists in field training institutions in the follow-up of students adversely affects the outcomes of specialization' with high availability; and lowest value of 3.1 is for statements 'The choice of institutions that are not suitable for training

students negatively affect the outcomes of the specialization' and 'The management of training institutions by professionals who do not specialize in sociology and service negatively affects the outcomes of the specialization' respectively with medium availability respectively.

4 Discussions

The study intends to provide useful information regarding different challenges that are being faced by students in achieving quality education. These challenges are studied in various domains including organizational challenges, field work institutional challenges; perceived challenges of students in educational institutions etc. Findings indicated that majority of the students felt difficulties due to insufficient guidance from teachers, while others were satisfied about the overall performance of faculty members. Similarly, majority of the students indicated that they share a very good relationship with their academic advisors. The main gap lies in advisor's timely availability for students during the office hours. Other major challenge for students includes the unavailability of specific area for meal time.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Respondent’s Perceptions Related to Organizational Difficulties in Learning Process.

Questions	Mean Values	St. Deviation	Ranking	Level of Impact
A convenient place for meals is available during the training program	2.96	0.85029	1	Medium
Officials are keen to achieve student satisfaction through the services provided to them by the training program	3.30	.70221	2	Medium
There are appropriate breaks during the course	3.30	.65126	3	Medium
I note the keenness of the training program to improve the quality of work	3.26	0.58329	4	High
The delay or absence from the application of the training program does not contribute to the development of my practical capabilities	3.30	0.74971	5	High
Axis as a whole	3.224	0.7073		Medium

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Respondent’s Perceptions Related to Institutional Difficulties in Field Training (Ranked in Descending Order).

Questions	Mean Values	St. Deviation	Ranking	Level of Impact
The choice of institutions that are not suitable for training students negatively affects the outcomes of the specialization.	3.1	0.86037	1	Medium
The scarcity of the presence of a social worker in some institutions negatively affects the output of the specialty.	3.4	0.7279	2	Medium
Lack of competence of specialists in field training institutions in the follow-up of students adversely affects the outcomes of specialization.	3.5	0.57235	3	High
Failure to determine the nature of the beneficiaries of the institution’s services adversely affects the output of the specialty.	3.4	0.49013	4	Medium
The management of training institutions by professionals who do not specialize in sociology and service negatively affects the outcomes of the specialization.	3.1	0.78492	5	Medium
Failure to open channels of communication between employees and each other within the institution adversely affects the output of the specialty.	3.4	.062606	6	Medium
Axis as a whole	3.3166	0.67696		Medium

Lack of supervisors' compatibility and their belonging from non-social working field poses greater challenges for students in terms of minimum skilled knowledge that restricts their abilities to a certain extent.

The study further added that the lack of competence of specialists in field training institutions during the students' follow-up negatively affects the outcomes of the specialization. Also, the lack of determining the nature of students enrolled in an institution adversely affects the outputs of the specialization. Lack of trainers' competence is a crucial problem that may affect the successful accomplishment of goal during field work. Organizational difficulties are the most complex issues, since these deals in recruiting and selecting specialized trainers and educators.

The implementation of the training program is based on different time durations, as officials are keen to achieve student satisfaction through the services provided to them. The results are consistent with the findings proposed by Li et al. [14] (2012), according to which lack of teachers' competency in required skills and knowledge ability was the major issue that was presented in many educational institutions of China. The idea is crucial since it makes student as less capable for those in need of any financial or legal assistance. This is due to the diverse population of clients that interact students (Gelman et al., 2008([15]; Bogo, 2015[12]; Gelman 2004 [16]).

David (2019) revealed that respondents perceived the course like advanced, technical and thus tries to grab knowledge with keen interest as it is associated to the practical side of the study. The idea is possible through additional provision of causative and attractive learning atmosphere that is in line with their curriculum. The findings of the study are in line with those proposed in the existing study. The study added that it is the responsibility of teachers to make the learning process interesting and attractive for students to stimulate maximum learning [17].

Stanhope et al (2011) examined the significance of organizational duty and commitment with the educational goal of social work. The study supported the findings of the present study and indicated that it is the responsibility of educational trainers to transfer upgraded knowledge to students [18]. This involves the implementation of the clinical methods in preparing the existing staff for future competencies and challenges in the field (Mirabito, 2012) [19]. The results proposed in this study are also endorsed by Pushkina (2017) [20] that provided important stances related to the views of social work trainers and educational institutions. The examination uncovered that schools promoting social work in Russia have not accomplished the total acknowledgment yet. Findings further indicated that the ignorance of organizational management is critical in posing threats to the wellbeing of young students.

Another study provided similar findings regarding the challenges faced by students during social work education. Tanga & Tangwe (2013) mentioned that there were several difficulties confronting during the field work of students that acquired trainings in Lesotho. The challenges include

the scarcity of social welfare organizations and poor management and supervision of social work students. This might be due to the maximum influence of western perspective of international social work education in the social work curriculum of Lesotho. Jönsson (2014) supported the idea, as much of the social work curriculum of Sweden is influenced through western regions resulting in the addition of different theoretical components that belong to the international regions. This would help students in tackling different problems related to social issues. The knowledge regarding the international practice of social work is effective in expanding the area of knowledge and to understand the social diversities found in various regions [21]. Nikku (2010) emphasized the need of self-reflection among different social work trainers, educators, policy makers to improvise their practices and policies based on the evolved environmental changes. The study further stressed the need of critical evaluations of the existing social work training programs. The idea can only be implemented by the development of useful models that may guide social workers in the educational and training process [22].

The study has important implications as it can greatly contribute in the field of sociology to provide greater benefits to both students and social work trainers. Another implication of the study is in the form of developing suitable and strict policies in the recruitment of social trainers, as they play a significant role in guiding social work students in mitigating the prevailing challenges in the field. The final implication of the study is in the educational institutions of UAE that offer specialized programs in sociology; thus, the study serves as a guideline for any such institution working in this area.

5 Conclusions

The study provides important information regarding the challenges met by students while conducting education in social work. Though training serves as an integral part of social work in the specialization of sociology, the remaining process of education depends upon the knowledge and skills of trainers that may cater challenges during the practical journey. Lack of fundamental resources, trained supervisors and effective contact between educational institutions and supervisors are some of the major gaps that are needed to be filled by educational institutions. The internalization of social work education and the needs associated to the social work standards is consistent in managing the needs of students. Lack of adequate training is yet another greater cause that has restricted to both students and teachers in attaining greater challenges in the given field. Paucity of the social organizations working in the field is another major challenge that lack the ability to provide relevant support at the time of need. The internalization of field work, while meeting the essential requirements of both students and teachers may help in performing effectively on the field. Therefore, there is a greater need of meeting the basic

requirements of students that are enrolled in the Ajman University, UAE.

Certain limitations are involved in this study, which are in the form of limited time and resources. Since the study is restricted to certain time durations therefore, it was not possible to recruit large sample in this study. This lacks the identification of teachers' perspective, as they serve as the crucial part of the overall process. In addition, the study recruited students from Ajman University only, that restricts the themes of the topic to a certain extent, therefore there lies a need to include students from other universities of UAE as this may create a significant impact over the results of the study. Another limitation of the study includes the selection of participants that belonged to a single university. Further, the results may not be generalized to other countries due to limited sample and time constraints.

Recommendations

Depending upon the problems outlined in this study, certain recommendations are made in this study. The first includes the need to conduct regular meetings between academic and field supervisors, and intensify visits to increase acquaintance and cooperation between the two sides, in order to exchange experiences which, help in achieving the objectives of the training process. Second recommendation is related to the effectiveness of students' training as it is the professional responsibility of the faculty and specialists who supervise the field training students to provide relevant knowledge. Next include the need to intensify and enhance the role of the academic advisor in guiding trainee and conducting dialogues to help advisors and trainee in consolidating the relationship between them, which simplifies the field training process and communication between them. Another important recommendation is related to the necessity of activating the visit of the academic supervisors to the students during their training inside the institutions and discussing their development and professional status with the specialists who supervise them and continue to follow them during a period.

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