The Place of Integrative Seminar in Social Work Education: University of Benin Experience.

Tracy Beauty Evbayiro Omorogiuwa

Abstract

The study was conducted to ascertain the place of integrative seminar in social work education at the University of Benin, Nigeria. A sample of 170 students was selected using the simple random sampling technique from a population of 287 students. The instrument used is a 25 item questionnaire, with a reliability coefficient of 0.90. The content validity was determined by 3 faculty members. One sample t-test was used to analyze the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings of this study reveal that integrative seminar affords students the opportunity to gain experience and to be more self confident. It improves commitment of students to social work ethics and it helps students to be social work-practice-oriented. In view of these findings, recommendations are made to all schools of social work to adopt integrative seminar as a major part of social work education as it enhances students' preparation for practice.

Integrative Seminar is a major medium for field education in social work practice which helps to complement theories and skills learned in Social Work education. It thus creates room for students to meet, discuss, share ideas, strengths and experiences of field practice. Mok (1993) established that integrative seminar as an integral component of practicum provides opportunity for students to discuss the integration of theory and practice; ethics and practice, to examine responses to clients and situations and to debate social policy issues. Integrative Seminar serves as a guided introduction to social work practice as faculty members expose students to the practical application of social work values, ethics, social problems and policy. It also help to assess how students put practice concepts into operation, sort out value dilemmas, apply social problem knowledge, and develop a range of problem-solving, clinical, advocacy, policy and resource development skills as objectives (University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Social Work, 2000).

Seminars promote the integration of social work concepts and theories learned in the classroom with social work practice skills learned in field placement. It helps to maximize the educational value of field education as it facilitates group learning and processing of field experience. However, integrative seminar is one of the mechanisms in which social work education strives to integrate knowledge, acquired in the classroom with that acquired from field education experience; it is a vehicle that helps to integrate and promote practice theory in social work education (Birkenmaier et al, 2003). To articulate field experience, theories and personal reflections; students are expected to process activities, questions and concerns reflected to field education. Through this group processing, the students connect their practice activities to critical practice issues such as values and ethics, diversity, social practice and self-awareness.

Overtime, students have been exposed to concepts, skills, principles, values, social issues and resolution strategies through classroom teachings and learning. In order to mix theory with practice students are also required to go on field placement as this will further expose them to the practical aspects of the classroom learning; then come together in a forum to blend their experiences. Innovative teaching and learning can be achieved through integrative seminars. As students who go on field placements attend integrative seminars they feel more relaxed to talk about their field experiences, expectations, challenges, hopes and learn more about other areas of social work practice. Razack (2002) pointed out that social work students are made to attend practicum seminars which cover a wide range of topics including innovative learning at nontraditional community settings involved in maintaining broad boundaries for social work practice. According to Weeks (1981), such
seminars offer students with alternative therapeutic work with individuals, families, allows group work, community development and organizing to be central rather than peripheral social work methods; also advocacy and systems brokerage are considered important as counseling.

Students need a space to discuss their academic and field practice experiences relating theory to practice issues. Walden and Brown (1985) stated that practicum seminar serves as an avenue for students to further theorize from their approaches and to build extra energy from their differing contexts. This avenue helps students to use their shared experiences to validate their feelings, to be challenged about their perspectives and be involved in problem-solving processes. Students also discuss tensions, problems in the field resulting from varied tasks abilities, organizational structures and procedures, personal values and beliefs. Essentially, social work field education is aimed at to helping students transfer the skills and theories learned in classroom to practice situations; and so it is more beneficial for students to engage in debates, reflections, discussions and analysis in order to understand what constitute effective intervention in practice. At the integrative seminar, students are allowed to discuss crucial issues about their field experiences as the atmosphere is not for evaluation but for peer assistance, support and field development which usually evolve through discussion with other students and they discuss problems with their practice skills or lack of the skills and want to know how to respond to social ills and solve problems (Razack, 2002).

The seminar requires social work students to make presentation of cases or experiences encountered while on the field. These are shared with their mates and faculty members in attendance. This further broadens their knowledge as new knowledge is acquired and the seminar reminds students of inclusive practice. Akinola (2001) reflected that besides a number of assignments and learning activities, practice activities can be developed in social work curriculum to facilitate the integration process. For example, an assignment in a practice class may require social work students to present a case in integrative seminar. However, social work students need classroom teachings, field experience and seminars in order to reflect the knowledge and skills base in social work practice. Quinny (2004), Doel and Shardlow (2005) reported in their studies that students learn more of practice from placement and practicum seminars. It is an opportunity for them to integrate the learning in the classroom and that of the field experience and that this also requires assistance from faculty members, colleagues, field supervisors, and field instructors. Students need opportunities to reach out to service users, to get equipped with practice and enhanced learning. Students attested to the fact that integrative seminar gives them the opportunity to meet to discuss concerns and development of their field placements, discuss issues related to their professional practice, how they perform as social workers in placement, how they relate to their supervisors and how they address practical issues as they arise.

Statement of the Problem

The training of the professional social worker is a complex process that involves theories and practice that is properly guided by ethics. In the course of the social work education, students are sent on field experience, under the supervision of agency based field supervisors and faculty members are assigned on routine supervision. With these measures in place, it is expected that the social work trainee is well equipped with the necessary knowledge to practise on graduation. To guarantee that this is so, there is the need for these students to share their experiences as a way of giving feedback. This is a gap that the integrative seminar seeks to fill. The question arises as to the necessity of this integrative seminar as an integral part of field education in social work education. There are individuals who believe that this is not necessary, hence the need to provide scientific evidence as to the relevance or otherwise of the integrative seminar. The problem is further highlighted in the following questions:

1. Does integrative seminar afford students the opportunity to share their experiences in social work field practice?
2. Does integrative seminar help build students’ self confidence in social work practice?
3. Does integrative seminar help expose students to the ethics of social work practice?
4. Does integrative seminar help students to be practice oriented?
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Hypotheses
1. Integrative seminar will not afford students the opportunity to share their experiences from social work field practice.
2. Integrative seminar will not help build students’ self confidence in social work practice.
3. Integrative seminar will not help improve commitment of students to the ethics of social work practice.
4. Integrative seminar will not help students to be practice oriented.

Purpose and Significance of Study
The purpose of this study is to determine whether integrative seminar is crucial in social work education. The findings of this study will be beneficial to students, faculty members, field education coordinators, field instructors, school authorities and professional social workers. The students, faculty members, field education coordinators, field instructors and school authorities will have knowledge of the importance of integrative seminar as it enhance the achievement of social work education. The students will be able to make informed choices to enhance their social work educational attainment.

Methodology
The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design. The population is the 287 bachelor of social work students at the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. The sample of the study is one hundred seventy students selected using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument adopted is the questionnaire, subdivided into two sections A and B. Section A contains the demographic data, while section B contained twenty items, likert scale, four option choice scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The validity of the instrument was established by experts’ judgments. The instrument was given to three experts in social work at the University of Benin who judged the instrument to have satisfied content validity. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach alpha formulae. The instrument was administered to twenty students and data collected was subjected to Cronbach alpha formulae alpha coefficients of 0.90 were obtained, thereby establishing the internal consistency of the scale. Data collection was done by the researcher. The data collected were analyzed using the one sample t – test of difference at 0.05 level of significance.

Results
Presentation of Findings. The findings of this study are presented as follows:

Hypothesis One
Integrative seminar will not afford students the opportunity to share their experience from social work field experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Test Mean</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrative seminar on the experience sharing of students from social work field experience</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>17.20</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>28.54</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

α= 0.05

Table 1 shows a calculated t value of 28.54, a mean of 17.50 and test mean of 12.5. Testing at an alpha level of 0.5 the P value is less than the alpha level. So the null hypothesis which states that
Hypothesis Two

Integrative seminar will not help build students self-confidence from social work field practice.

Table 2: One-sample t-test of Integrative Seminar on Students Self-confidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Test Mean</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrative seminar on students self-confidence from social work field experience</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>37.20</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows a calculated t value of 37.20, a mean of 17.89 and test of mean 12.5. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the P value is less than alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that “integrative seminar will not help build students self-confidence in social work field practice” is rejected. Consequently, integrative seminar helps to build students self-confidence in social work practice.

Hypothesis Three

Integrative seminar will not help improve students’ commitment to the ethics of social work practice.

Table 3: One-Sample t-test of Integrative Seminar on Students Commitment to the Ethics of Social Work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Test Mean</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrative seminar on students commitment to ethics.</td>
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<td>17.01</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>24.86</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows a calculated t value of 24.86, a mean of 17.01 and test of mean 12.5. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the P value is less than alpha level. So, the null hypothesis which states that “integrative seminar will not help improve students commitment to the ethics of social work” is rejected. Consequently, integrative seminar helps to improve commitment of students to the ethics of social work.

Hypothesis Four

Integrative Seminar will not help students to be practice oriented.
Table 4: One-Sample t-test of Integrative Seminar on students Practice Orientedness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Test Mean</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrative seminar on students being practice oriented</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>24.09</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

α = 0.05

Table 4 shows a calculated t value of 24.09, a mean of 17.25 and test of mean of 12.5. Testing at an alpha level of .05, the P value is less than alpha level. So the null hypothesis which states that “integrative seminar will not help students to be practice oriented” is rejected. Consequently Integrative seminar helps students to be practice oriented.

Discussion of Findings

This study has found that integrative seminar affords students the opportunity to share their experiences from field practice. This is in agreement with the findings of Razack (2002) who in her study of transforming the field, established that at the integrative seminar, students are allowed to discuss crucial issues about their field experiences. The atmosphere is on peer assistance, support and field development which evolve through sharing experiences with other students; they discuss their problems and how to respond to problems. This study has shown that integrative seminar will help build students self confidence in field practice. This is supported by the work of Walden and Brown (1985), who concluded that practicum seminar, serves as an avenue for students to further theorize from their approaches and to build extra energy from their differing concepts, as this helps them to validate their feelings and to be challenged about their perspectives.

Furthermore, this study also found that integrative seminar helps to improve commitments of students to the ethics of social work. The findings of the University of Wisconsin –Madison School of Social Work (2000) revealed that integrative seminar serves as a guided introduction to social work practice as it exposes students to practical application of social work values, ethics and policy; and in assessing how students put these practice concepts into operation. Mok (1993) also reflected that integrative seminar gives students the opportunity to integrate ethics in practice and to debate social policy issues. In addition, this study also found that seminar helps students to be practice oriented. This is in agreement with the findings of Quinny (2004); Doel and Shardlow (2005) as they in their studies have shown that students learn more of practice from placement and seminars, enhancing their opportunities to reach out to service users and to get equipped with practice and enhanced learning.

Conclusion

Integrative seminar is an integral part of field education in social work education that provides opportunities for students to learn. There is the need to get feedback from students on field placements and as such engaging students in this forum gives them opportunity to discuss issues and concerns relevant to their placements, learn, encourage and develop peer support. The faculty member who is the seminar coordinator is expected to be critical in corrections and in facilitating students’ discussions and reflections during the seminar sections. To ensure a whole lot of these, the seminar coordinator or instructor needs to have a grasp of students’ challenges, hopes, strength and the structure of the agency as this will further assist in building the practical skills acquired by the students. Students are encouraged to be cognizant of the functions, policies and procedures of the agencies they are placed. Integrative seminars link competences learned in classrooms and field experiences and provide opportunities for skills development that reflects social work practice.

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The findings of this study have revealed that integrative seminar affords students the opportunity to gain experience; it helps students to be more self confident, it helps improve commitment of students to ethics and it helps students to be practice oriented in social work practice. In view of the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that integrative seminar be a major...
part of social work education in all schools of social work; and after every placement there should be a seminar thereby enhancing students’ preparation for practice.

**References**


