



Exploring Factors hindering harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi

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Abstract

Social work has three important areas: education, research and practice. Social work practice has a professional approach to alleviating social problems in societies. It is focused on helping the vulnerable in society on a daily basis. For social work education to be relevant to the contextualized problems, there is need for harmonizing curriculum in higher education which involves integrating different curricula through political, academic and cultural devices while respecting the institutional particularities and characteristics. Due to the fact that the profession is in its developmental stages in Malawi, schools of social work are using globalized curricula which are not specifically reflecting the concerns and priorities of Malawi as a country. This problem can only be solved, if social work curricula in the institutions for higher education are harmonized. This study therefore was conducted to explore factors that have affected the process of harmonizing social work curriculum in Malawi. The study collected data from 47 purposively selected social work graduates, representatives for higher education institutions, social work employers and leadership for Association of Social Workers in Malawi who were taken through self-administered questionnaires. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The qualitative analysis used thematic analysis and the quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. The study has found out that in Malawi there are diversified needs for a harmonized social work curriculum. This is the case because there are variations in capacity and performance among professionals in the field of social work, variations in teaching contents and teaching practices, the profession is susceptible to non-social workers who claim to be social workers and there is a mismatch between the need and skill in the field of social work. The study has also observed that the problems that have been brought in by un-harmonized social work curriculum have been attended to by different stakeholders. Efforts that the study has captured include: Development of social work Bill, organizing meetings with National Council for Higher Education in Malawi, Organizing meetings with schools of social

work in Malawi, Consultancy services to higher education institutions and Learning visits to outside countries. However, the stakeholders' efforts towards a harmonized social work curriculum have been facing challenges that have led to the delayed establishment of a harmonized social work curriculum. Such challenges include; Lack of funding, unwillingness by some universities to participate in processes regarding the topic, lack of legal frame work to guide the process and its implementation, resistance from some officials who are afraid of being negatively affected if the social work profession gets organized and inadequate publicity of the profession and the topic to stakeholders.

IndexTerms - Component,formatting,style,styling,insert.

1. INTRODUCTION

Like in other parts of the world, Social work has a long history in Malawi. It evolved from a community development certificate in 1964 at Magomero College to a degree program at Catholic University of Malawi, DMI St. John the Baptist University, University of Malawi and University of Lilongwe among other higher education institutions offering social work related programs. Currently DMI St. John the Baptist University in collaboration with DMI St. Eugene University of Zambia have commenced masters and doctorate programmes (Potts, 1986).

It is argued that it is necessary for academia to respond to changes and challenges facing the world if the world is to have training programs that will address changes facing the globe. This can be achieved by harmonizing curricula in reference to their markets, Heri Bezić (2000, p1). In Malawian context, through a study which was done by Felix Kakowa in 2016, it was found out that Malawian schools of social work train social work generalists or generic social workers who go through programs which are yet to be contextualized and harmonized. In other words, Malawian social work education operates on universal social needs and standards. This situation needs to be worked on, if Malawian social work education clients are to benefit from the programs offered by schools of social work in Malawi.

Harmonization deficit in higher education has proven to have compromised the achievement of sustainable development goals through the delay in developing appropriate capacity towards achieving education for all and formulating sustainable solutions to address peace deficit and the rise in conflicts, environmental migration, food insecurity, water shortage, poverty and human misery. The specific challenges facing higher education systems is underpinned by the mismatch between skills and industry requirements, inflexible admission criteria, the absence of credit transfer arrangements (locally, regionally and internationally) and poor recognition of African qualifications externally. Additionally, coupled with the tendency for African governments to liberalize educational provision, local and private higher education is rapidly growing unfettered by quality assurance requirements in the absence of clearly defined quality standards and regulations in many African countries. Overall, African higher education is viewed with a suspicion that weakens its competitive edge internally as well as externally. Besides the reputational risk, poor quality higher education entails capital and financial losses for African countries. Hence harmonizing the social

work curriculum in Malawi would help the program meet contextualized needs of social work and reduce the losses the country incurs due to lack of harmonized curriculum.

1.1. NEED OF THE STUDY.

This study will help key social work education stakeholders have knowledge of what factors are affecting the process of harmonizing the social work curriculum in Malawi. This will help them map the feasible way forward on harmonizing the social work curriculum in Malawi which will help the social work profession to meet the contextualized needs in Malawi.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology section outlines the plan and method on how the study is conducted. This includes Universe of the study, sample of the study, Data and Sources of Data, study's variables and analytical framework. The details are as follows;

2.1. Population and Sample

In terms of statistics it is not clear of how many of the social work professionals and stakeholders Malawi has

However, the study targeted key stakeholders in professional social in Malawi.

These include but not limited to: schools of social work, graduate social workers, ministry of gender, community development and social welfare, state and non-state agencies practicing social work and members of Association of Social Workers in Malawi

2.2. Data and Sources of Data

For this study primary data was collected from key social work education stakeholders mentioned in population and sample section through self-administered questionnaires which captured the respondents' views on the factors that have affected the process of harmonizing the social work curriculum in Malawi.

2.3. Theoretical framework

Variables of the study contains dependent and independent variable. The study used theories of regional harmonization which provide some theoretical foundation in studying the nature, process and outcome of regionalism trends as the efforts to integrate higher education policies are part of a more general process of integrating sovereign states in new political and institutional order. Two of the theories are: neo-functionalism and inter-governmentalism

Neo-functionalism is rooted in the liberal tradition of international relations studies. It places major emphasis on the role of non-state actors to bring change in a country. Neo-functionalists claim that as the process of integration speed-up, interest groups and associations within the pluralistic societies of nation-states will transfer their allegiance away from national institutions towards the supra-national institutionsa (Wiener & Diez, 2009).

Unlike in Neo-functionalism, this theory emphasizes the major role of states in international politics and associate themselves with a thought of international relations. They state that the action of states is determined significantly by national interests and for reasons of defending national sovereignty (Moravcsik, 1993). According to this theory, the attainment of integration depends upon the ability of nation-states to adjust and respond to the cooperative agreements that define integration.

2.4. Research instruments/ data collection method

Research instruments is a guide or simply devices that are used to obtain information relevant to research project. Therefore, this research study used self-administered questionnaires to gather information. Self-administered questionnaires were chosen due to the fact that one can contact a large number of people at a relatively low cost (postal, email and telephone), it is easy to reach people who are spread across a wide geographical area or who live in remote locations (in this case respondents were widely spread across Malawi). However, there were some weaknesses with the use of self-administered questionnaires that were already dealt with already in this study. Some of these weaknesses include: There was little control over who completed a questionnaire, which led to bias if one was trying to target particular groups of respondents, Response rates were low and refusal rates were high.

2.5. Sample size

A sample size of 46 was used in this study. 5 heads of schools of social work, 6 lecturers, 5 leaders of Association of Social Workers in Malawi, 1 representative from ministry of gender responsible for higher education, 21 social work graduates and 8 social work employers in Malawi. The sample was deemed sufficient because it is assumed to achieve data saturation. The sample is deemed sufficient because it is assumed to achieve data saturation cost effective. (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

2.6. Sampling method

Locke et al (1987) refer to sampling as the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population. Sampling is either probability or non-probability.

There are a lot of non-probability sampling methods such as convenience, quota, snow-ball and purposive. For this study, judgmental sampling was chosen. This sampling technique was chosen because the study leaned more towards qualitative data. Hence only few variables were quantitatively analyzed. The option of

selecting a sample to represent the population understudy was taken because of limited resources and time to cover the entire population to be studied.

2.7. Pre-testing/ pilot study (Validity and reliability)

To achieve data quality, the research had to be piloted by pretesting the methods and tools that were used in the real study. This process controlled reliability and validity of instruments which were used. This enabled the researcher to re-design the research instruments wherever necessary.

The pilot study was done at DMI St. John the Baptist University Malawi; Lilongwe campus. The research tools used herein were pretested on 10 respondents who had 100 percent qualities with the main target respondents in this study..

2.8. Inclusion criteria for study participants

- The graduates were supposed to be graduates from Malawian schools of social work
- The heads were supposed to be the serving members of the schools of the social work in Malawi
- The employers were supposed to be active employers of social workers working in Malawi and
- The members of the association were supposed to be serving leaders and active members of the association

2.9. Exclusion criteria

- Those that did not meet the criteria above

2.10. Data Analysis

This section spells out how the data were processed and summarized. It indicates statistical tests that were carried out and how the resulting information was used in the research report

In this study, SPSS and thematic analysis were used to analyse data and statistically the study used chi-square to reach an appropriate conclusion. This was the case as the study employed mixed research design of which it had both quantitative and qualitative data that was subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses. Hence the SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative variables and thematic analysis was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the respondents on the subject. As stipulated in the data collection instruments section, the SPSS was used to analyse responses to the closed questions and the thematic analysis was used on the open-ended questions.

Thematic analysis approach consists of six phases which include: Familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The underlying meaning of the different categories of the codes were formulated into refined themes. At the end of data analysis only three themes emerged from the data. These were as follows: needs for a harmonized social work curriculum in Malawi, efforts made towards harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi and challenges facing the process of harmonizing social work curriculum in Malawi. The results were presented in quotations from the respondents to support the contextual analysis and provide an opportunity for discussion of the results of the study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results for Descriptive Statics of Study Variables

Table 1 Categories of social workers represented in the study

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Higher Education Institutions | 11 | 23.9 |
| Ministry of gender | 1 | 2.2 |
| ASWIM | 5 | 10.9 |
| Graduates | 29 | 63.0 |
| Total | 46 | 100.0 |

Table 2 Cross tabulation of association between institutions represented and the efforts made towards harmonization of social work curriculum

Name of the institutions represented in the study * Efforts made by participants

Cross tabulation

Count

| Name of the institutions represented in the study | | Efforts made by participants | | Total |
|---|---|-------------------------------|----|-------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| | | Higher Education Institutions | 4 | |
| Ministry of gender | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| ASWIM | 5 | 0 | 5 | |
| Graduants | 4 | 25 | 29 | |
| Total | | 14 | 32 | 46 |

Table 3 Chi-square Tests

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 17.690 ^a | 3 | .001 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 18.845 | 3 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 46 | | |

a. 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .30.

Table 1 show number categories of the participants that were represented in this study. the table shows that 5 participants represented Association of Social Workers in Malawi, 8 represented employers for social workers in Malawi, 1 represented ministry of gender, 11 represented schools of social work in Malawi and 21 represented social work graduates.

Table 2 shows cross-tabulated data between the institutions that were represented in this study and the efforts that were exerted towards the agenda. It shows that out of 11 representatives for higher education institutions only 4 had made efforts to harmonize the curriculum. Further, it shows that the ministry of gender also had efforts made towards the same agenda. All ASWIM members had also made efforts to harmonize the curriculum and lastly, only 4 out of 29 graduates had exerted some efforts to harmonize the curriculum

Table 3 is a presentation of chi-square tests. It shows that at degrees of freedom of 3 and at significance level of 0.01 the Pearson chi-square value was pinned at 17.690^a and likelihood ratio was at 18.845

The results outlined above have been divided into three themes which include: Need for social work curriculum harmonization in Malawi, efforts made towards harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi and Factors that have hindered the efforts made towards social work curriculum harmonization in Malawi.

3.1.1. Theme 1: Need for social work curriculum in Malawi

It is argued that Higher education is expected to provide students with a mechanism to contextualize world events and to understand their responsibility for engagement and response (Asamoah 2003). In the field of social work, such contextualization and understanding interface with a set of professional values.

The study has found out that harmonization of social work curriculum is highly needed in Malawi. This is the case as the majority of the respondents (97.8 percent) pointed out need for social work curriculum harmonization with different reasons which include

- 3.1.1.1. **Variations in capacity and performance in the field of social work.** The study established that there are variations in terms of capacity and performance among social workers holding the same qualification but from different schools of social work in Malawi. This is based on the fact that social workers from different schools of social work are taken through different contents and practices. Hence some social workers do not know what to do when given tasks at workplaces “*it is to note that some social workers seem not to know what to do at work places*”. As a result, more on job training is needed to help them have the capacity and skills that are needed on the ground. Based on this, social workers from certain schools of social work stand high chances of getting employed than those from other

schools of social work. Some respondents lamented that these variations make it difficult for social workers to refer cases to a fellow social work due to fear of differences in capacity and know how.

3.1.1.2. Variations in teaching contents and teaching practices. It was found out that some schools of social work in Malawi are teaching contents that are not in Malawian context and students are subjected to different procedures throughout their training. For example, in some schools of social work, students spend three months doing practicum while in some school the practicum is given only few weeks. It was also reported that some schools are very serious with practicum while some are not. For example; some schools of social work allocate a special team to supervise students attached to different work places and attachment results determine the students' academic future while in some schools the students are not supervised at all. This is the main cause for discrepancies the profession is facing on the ground in Malawi. This is the case because those that come from schools that are serious on practicum do not struggle at work place unlike those that come from schools that do not seriously supervise practicum sessions *“in terms of content we are almost harmonized but the main difference is on practicum”*

Hence, in addition to the efforts schools of social work have put forward towards teaching contents, they also need to think of working on their practicum if the differences among professional social workers are to be minimized in Malawi.

3.1.1.3. Susceptibility of the profession to non-social workers. The study also learned that social work profession is not protected in Malawi. This is the case because anyone can work as a professional social worker in Malawi provided they have some capacity to work with people. This puts lives of many innocent Malawians at risk of being harmed in the process *“employing non-social workers as social workers threaten lives of the clients as they do not use some principles and values that should be employed when working with people”*. So, harmonization and contextualization of social work curriculum could protect the profession and the clients from the harm that could be caused by non-social work professionals.

3.1.1.4. Need and skill mismatch. The study also learned that the current social work slightly does not match the need in Malawi. This is the case because for quite a long period, Malawi has been using general social work whose focus has been on community development but currently Malawi needs specialized social workers to handle the prevailing social problems

facing Malawi such as the increasing case of suicide, divorce and delinquencies among Malawians “*Malawi now needs less of general social workers rather we need more of specialized social workers*”. This finding agrees with what F. Kakowa observed in his 2016 article which was named: “*nurturing professional social work in Malawi*’ which advocated for contextualization of social work in Malawi.

Hence, legally regulated social work curriculum would provide the quality of the skills that are needed on the ground thereby facilitating sustainable development in Malawi.

3.1.2. Theme 2: Efforts made towards harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi

The study established that a lot of efforts have been put in place to push for harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi and some progress has been made. One of the respondents reported that efforts to harmonize social work curriculum started way back in 1990s when a Council for social workers was established which was then changed to Council for Non-Governmental organizations in Malawi. Another early effort towards harmonization of social work curriculum was the establishment of National Social Workers Association in 2016 which is now known as Association of Social Workers in Malawi (ASWIM).

It is evident in this study that efforts have been and are being made towards a harmonized social work curriculum in Malawi. Upon its establishment, ASWIM did not just sit back, but it became an engine for the whole process of harmonizing the profession in Malawi. So far, ASWIM in conjunction with ministry of gender and other partners has made a lot of efforts towards harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi. Such efforts include the following:

3.1.2.1. Development of social work Bill. ASWIM, ministry of gender, ministry of Justice and other partners have been working on a social work bill whose aim is to regulate social work profession at all levels. This bill will see schools of social work having standards which are provided in an act of the Parliament of Malawi. The bill will also regulate recruitment of social workers with an aim of safeguarding the citizenry. The bill was sent to the ministry of Justice; however, it was sent back for some corrections. “*The efforts towards a harmonized social work curriculum are at advanced stage as the bill was in the hands of ministry of justice*”.

The returning of the bill from ministry of justice is indicative of the efforts and willingness of ASWIM and other stakeholders in harmonization of social work curriculum. This is the case because in presence of this bill any institutions that will seem to be reluctant on any provision of the bill, they will be acted upon by the act, unlike now where no one has legally bound powers to do that.

3.1.2.2. Organizing meetings with National Council for Higher Education in Malawi.

ASWIM has made efforts to engage the National Council for Higher Education in Malawi. The engagement aimed at enquiring on the standards NCHE uses to accredit schools of social work in Malawi. This is so because ASWIM does not have legal backing for them to regulate or force institutions of higher education to review the curricula. However, in their meetings with NCHE they did not reach a consensus on what is to be followed to help regulate the profession in Malawi. To date, ASWIM still contemplates on re-engaging NCHE for the two to reach a conclusion on the issue. *“The NCHE has only been engaged once, but we are planning to go back to them”*

3.1.2.3. Organizing meetings with schools of social work in Malawi.

It was also established in this study that ASWIM and the ministry of Gender have been organizing meetings with the higher education institutions in Malawi to negotiate for the review of their curricula. Two years have gone now from the time the first meeting was conducted. This shows that ASWIM and other partners have tried their best for schools of social work to have similar modules and contents. It was reported in this study that, in terms of modules, the curricula are almost harmonized as there are only very little observable differences in modules. The only big difference is in practicum. *“yes, five schools of social work in Malawi have been engaged once on modules that they teach and they are also regularly engaged in social work practice educators’ sessions”*

In absence of the social work bill, the approach to negotiate with individual schools seems to be the only feasible way as already the institutions of higher education in Malawi review their curricula at the interval of their will. Hence ASWIM and the entire social work fraternity would take advantage of this to negotiate on what should be included in their social work education guiding documents. This approach has proven to be working, however; follow ups have not been done yet. to check if the institutions that were engaged are really adhering to the recommendations.

For the goal of having a harmonized social work curriculum in Malawi, key authorities should not relent in engaging the relevant stakeholders as it is only through extensive dialogue between ASWIM and the institutions of higher education that would see Malawi achieving this as recommended by *Gray, M. & Allegritti, I. (2002)* in their study called: *Cross-cultural practice and the indigenization of African social work.*

3.1.2.4. Consultancy services to higher education institutions.

The study has noted that Ministry of gender have been giving guidance to institutions for higher education that seek support from them. The ministry has always been there to supports institutions that contact them for help concerning social work education in Malawi. This has been the case because the ministry too has no legal backing to regulate the profession, however their role is to just coordinate activities related to social work.

In this case, it shows that for Malawi to get to where we want to be with this issue of social work curriculum harmonization, there is need for buy in of the concept by all relevant stakeholders in social work. It is sad to note that as of now there are very little allies in the fight for a harmonized social work in Malawi both internally and externally. This is the case because ASWIM and ministry of Gender have received very little support from non-state welfare organization sector and some professional social workers in the country. Much has to be done to engage the third sector in Malawi for the ASWIM and ministry of Gender for their voice to be louder enough to attract attention from politicians and all other stakeholders involved in the process of taking a bill to the parliament for passing. *“ASWIM is lacking partners and all other forms of allies to push for our agendas”*

3.1.2.5. Learning visits to outside countries. Upon establishing need for harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi, ASWIM and ministry of gender organized learning visits to other countries. The team had visited Zimbabwe and Uganda for the said trips. The trips were organized to learn what our friends from these two countries did to harmonize social work curriculum.

3.1.3. Theme 3: Hindrances facing the process of harmonizing social work curriculum in Malawi

Despite registering a lot on harmonization of social work curriculum through the efforts that have been put forwards in Malawi, it has also been established that the process is facing a number of blocks. 80% of the respondents acknowledged that despite the fact that some processes have commenced towards harmonization of the social curriculum, there have been some factors that have been pulling down the process. Such hindrances range from problems emanating from individual social work professionals, higher education institutions, ASWIM, the ministry responsible and other key stakeholders. Some of the factors that have shot down the efforts include the following:

3.1.3.1. Lack of funding. Both the ASWIM and Ministry of gender complained to have challenges in terms of funds committed for the task of harmonizing social work curriculum. As a result, only one meeting with leadership from five schools of social work in Malawi has been conducted in a period of two years. Hence, no follow up meetings are yet to be conducted due to the same challenge. *“The major challenge is that the association does not have funding for its operations, especially on this topic”*

It is sad to note that there are a lot of acclaimed social workers in Malawi but their mother body is suffering from lack of funds for running their operations. Is it that the ASWIM has tried other means to solicit funds or they are just dependent on donor funds? *“It is sad for a seven-year-old body like ASWIM to be struggling with finances while having a lot of acclaimed social workers in Malawi”*. However, ASWIM has attributed their status to the fact that for the past five years the association was run by an interim committee of which

little was done to set up structures in the body. Hence the association has set up plans to engage its members in resource mobilization and to use other means for generating income in the association. *“among our members are people with different skills; hence we are planning to divide them in groups of their skills of which one will be tasked on resource mobilization”*

Despite the said plans to engage its members on resource mobilization, this study suggests that the board of trustees of the association should think of revisiting the organogram of the association so that all the office bearer should work towards benefiting the association.

3.1.3.2. Unwillingness by some universities to participate in processes regarding the topic.

The study also established that among the institutions of higher education offering social work, there are some who have been showing some rigidity and unwillingness towards reviewing their curricula. Some schools of social work do not even attend meetings despite being invited. Among such institutions that do not show up for meetings on the topic, there are some that do not want to have an online meetings rather physical ones.

This on the other hand indicates the type of relationship between the ASWIM and key stakeholders especially the higher education Institutions. It shows some gaps in as far as dialogue is concerned between two complementing entities. It can be said that this situation shows that there are some schools of social work who do not have a buy in of the concept and its tasks. If this habit continues between the association and the institutions, the institutions should expect to fair bad on the market because this study has established that there is a syndrome among employers of preferring graduates from some institutions to other institutions. This is based on the fact that out of the eight employers that were interviewed, six acknowledge to have preference on graduates from some institutions to others. This preference was greatly attributed to the work that the employers take to on job train some graduate from some schools. This means that students from the schools whose graduates do not perform well on the ground will suffer on the market.

This finding support the finding of a study in Ethiopia which was conducted by Jimma T. and Tarekegn W. M. in 2016. The study ascertained that curricular reforms appear to have been undermined by the dominance of traditional lecture-based instruction and summative assessment discourse, and the lack of readiness of the teachers for change necessitated by the suggested curricular reforms. Hence the ASWIM and ministry of Gender should engage the institutions to the maximum and sometimes even to the extent of meeting management teams and staff from the schools.

3.1.3.3. Lack of legal frame work to guide the process and its implementation. Lack of legal framework to guide the profession was reported to be one of the key factors challenging the efforts on harmonization of social work curriculum in Malawi. This is the case because the profession is yet to have policies that guide its education and practice. The

only potential policy that the stakeholders have been pushing for has also been sent back from ministry of justice for corrections.

Such situations are disastrous to a profession as to the words of Wassie Kebede 2019 in an online study titled: *Social Work Education in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future*. Hence for Malawian Social work to be in harmony with the needs on the markets and to reduce the discrepancies in the profession, it needs a legally bound regulator on top the of ministry of gender and Association of Social Workers in Malawi

3.1.3.4. Resistance from some officials who are afraid of being negatively affected if the social work profession gets organized. The study also established some allegations that some government and private sector officials deliberately sabotage the efforts to harmonize the curriculum due to fear that once the profession gets organized, some of them would negatively be affected. This is observed amidst the efforts for the profession to be professionalized in Malawi where initially every extension worker was fit for social work duties. *“It is hard to engage some authorities and some local welfare organizations and individuals because some of them feel that their jobs will be at risk if social work profession gets a legal regulator”*.

This paper is of the view that in circumstances like this, radical approach does not work. Hence professionalization of social work, especially harmonization of social work curriculum should not in any way threaten jobs of others but rather bring together all those practicing the profession in the country regardless their back ground. Hence the association of social workers in Malawi and the ministry of gender should devise strategies that will benefit all social work practitioners through advocating for legal framework that will not divide the practitioners. This is the case because it was written by Roland N. Ndille 2016 that *“until both sides are determined to put national interests above their interests, harmonization and the ultimate establishment of a national educational system cannot be achieved”*.

3.1.3.5. Inadequate publicity of the profession and the topic to stakeholders. The study has also established that the profession and social work curriculum harmonization in particular have not been sold enough to attract attention of other key stakeholders. This has been the case because the Association of Social Workers and the ministry of gender have not been able to have enough allies at both local and international levels. For example; some professional social workers reported to have seen no value in ASWIM as the association has so far done very little to upscale the lives of professional social workers in Malawi. At the stage the professionalization of social work is, the association together with ministry of gender need more allies than ever. Hence it is advisable that deliberate efforts be made for the agenda to attract both the local and international stakeholders. The two should not only sell of the agenda to the said stakeholders but also should prove to them that social

3.1.4. Statistical Testing of the results

Statistical analysis is a tool that helps researchers find patterns and differences in the data as well as identify relationships between variables. The nature of the data collected and the design of the study determine the appropriate significance test that should be used. If for example, the data are normally distributed and scaled at intervals, parametric tests are appropriate. Otherwise, nonparametric tests should be considered. Various statistical methods are available for comparing the means of multiple groups. This chapter introduces different types of t tests and ANOVA tests as examples of commonly used parametric tests for comparing means. Examples of nonparametric tests include the Chi-square test, the Mann-Whitney U test and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Correlation analysis allows the identification of significant relationships between two variables. When three or more variables are involved and a quantitative model is needed to describe the relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables, regression analysis can be considered.

Based on the nature of this study chi-square test was used to measure where there were significant differences among the means of the groups represented in this study and whether, those differences were a result of sampling error or by chances.

- The null (H_0) hypothesis for this study was that all members of the institutions who participated in this study had made efforts to harmonize the social work curriculum in Malawi.
- Alternative hypothesis therefore was that not all members of the institutions represented in this study had made efforts towards a harmonized curriculum

Confidence level was set at 99%. Hence significance level was at 1%.

After collecting the chi-square value of the test, the value was subjected to chi-square table at df 3 and confidence level of 99% and the critical value came out to be 11.34

Finally, the obtained Chi-Square was compared to the critical value and the result was the obtained chi-square was larger than the critical value (17.690 and 11.34). This implies that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The study is therefore relatively confident in concluding that the observed frequencies were significantly different from the frequencies that were expected. Hence, the institution of the key stakeholders for harmonization of social work curriculum is positively associated with the efforts made towards the subject. In other words, this means that some key stakeholders in the process of harmonizing social work curriculum are more key than others hence, activities of some stakeholders are not more influential than others.

4. CONCLUSION

The study has discovered that in Malawi there are diversified needs for a harmonized social work curriculum. Some of the gaps that need a harmonized curriculum include: variations in capacity and performance among professionals in the field of social work, variations in teaching contents and teaching practices, the profession is susceptible to non-social workers who claim to be social workers and there is a mismatch between the need and skill in the field of social work. The study has also observed that some of the problems that have brought in by un-harmonized social work curriculum have been attended to by different stakeholders. Efforts that the study has captured include: Development of social work Bill, organizing meetings with National Council for Higher Education in Malawi, Organizing meetings with schools of social work in Malawi, Consultancy services to higher education institutions and Learning visits to outside countries. However, the stakeholders' efforts towards a harmonized have been facing challenges that have led to the delayed establishment of a harmonized social work curriculum. Such challenges include; Lack of funding, unwillingness by some universities to participate in processes regarding the topic, lack of legal frame work to guide the process and its implementation, resistance from some officials who are afraid of being negatively affected if the social work profession gets organized and inadequate publicity of the profession and the topic to stakeholders. Based on the chi-square test explained above, it can be inferred that stakeholders in the process of harmonizing social work curriculum have varying capacities in the fight for a harmonized social work curriculum. For example, the ASWIM, institutions for higher education and ministry of gender are more influential as compared to employers and mere graduates. It is therefore recommended that such influences be utilized to the maximum, if the pace of the process is to be speeded up.

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