

The Specifics of Teaching Social Work at Universities in Arab Countries

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Abstract: The processes of democratization, observed in recent years in the traditionally conservative Arab world, actualize the need for social workers, so the aim of the study was to study the features of teaching social work in Arab communities. Twelve universities with undergraduate programs in social work were randomly selected to compare these universities' curricula and social work programs and Ajman University. One conclusion is that social work programs in Arab communities should rely on traditional values of Islamic culture and legal literacy to achieve professionally necessary competence. Improvement of curricula and social work programs following international standards of the profession and taking into account the ethnocultural and religious characteristics of the Arab world will provide the Arab communities with highly qualified social workers who can competently provide support to the needy population categories.

Keywords: Arab communities, education, social work.

A social worker is a specialist who provides household, moral, and legal support to the most vulnerable population segments. Social workers provide services to improve life opportunities in pursuit of social justice for individuals, groups, communities, and society at large (Brown, 2020). Complex and diverse professional tasks place high demands on social workers' personal qualities and educational levels. The democratization processes that have been observed in recent years in the traditionally conservative Arab world and called the "Arab Spring" actualize the need for social workers, primarily to ensure the rights of the most vulnerable population segments, tackle gender equality issues, prevent interethnic and religious tension, overcome social and psychological consequences of military conflicts, etc. (Ibrahim, 2018; Sarhan et al., 2021).

The importance of the professional activity of a social worker in modern society has caused an increase in the relevance of the specialty "social work" on a global scale; however, in the world, the development of this profession considers the ethnocultural specifics, national characteristics, and traditions (Jammal-Abboud, 2021). This accounts for the difficulties students and social work professionals face in achieving cultural competence. A few Arab researchers draw attention to the fact that tension arising from the collision of different and

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especially conflicting cultures or in situations of ethnic and religious conflicts can contribute to the professional burnout of social workers (Alkaabi et al., 2020; Ibrahim, 2018).

Researchers like Levin-Keini and Ben Shlomo (2017) see overcoming this problem using Freud's classical psychoanalytic approach, with the help of which cultural competence can develop under two conditions: interpersonal contact between teacher and student and student's intrapersonal work. There is significantly less literature on teaching social work in Arab communities than about other countries. Still, there are many descriptions of the social problems that social workers have to work on within Arab communities (Mahajne & Meler, 2022; Sarhan & Tadam, 2020). First of all, a priority area of research is the relationship between social workers and clients of different nationalities in the Middle East countries (Sarhan et al., 2021). For example, the work of Palestinian social workers living in Israel with Jewish clients is discussed (Jammal-Abboud, 2021; Kadan et al., 2017).

Researchers note the tense political reality, the presence of many fears, anger, and hatred, and distinguish five main categories reflecting the perceived reciprocal reactions: avoidance, power changes, confrontation, and anger, minimizing differences, and exploiting differences (Al-Makhamreh et al., 2016; Jammal-Abboud, 2021). The use of context-sensitive practice theory, training, and supervision is proposed to overcome these negative emotional collisions and move from confrontation to cooperation and acquire positive relationship experiences (Kadan et al., 2017).

Ethnocultural differences between representatives of the Arab and European communities are manifested in social stereotypes and attitudes towards traditions. In general, the topic of sexism occupies a significant place in the preparation of students in social work faculties (Levin et al., 2015). Social workers address aspects of sexuality in almost all areas of activity (Segal-Engelchin et al., 2020) as some of the most fundamental and frequent social problems are associated with sexual violence (Dodd & Tolman, 2017), as well as with the recently popular topic of LGBT communities (Scull & Mousa, 2017). Authors like Dodd and Tolman (2017) emphasize the need to include the issue of sexuality in curricula and practice of social work and advocate the integration of a multidimensional approach to sexuality in social work education, practice, and research. The tense political environment with periodic exacerbation of military confrontation leads to the formation of numerous traumatic experiences and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) among civilians of border regions, such as the Gaza Strip, which affects daily life and well-being of the civilian population and is an essential area of social work (Weinberg et al., 2017).

Social work can play a particularly important role in addressing social justice, civil rights, and human rights issues as a broad field, encompassing micro, meso, and macro areas of practice (Bent-Goodley & Hopps, 2017; Oles, 2017). A universal approach using relevant knowledge from different disciplines allows social workers the flexibility to help solve various potential problems at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. The flexibility and creativity inherent in the social work profession are gaining in value as technological progress creates new social problems, complicates social justice issues, and creates additional opportunities for understanding social and behavioral phenomena; this makes it necessary to form relevant professional competencies among social work students (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Williams, 2016).

Global neoliberal policies have increased the burden on social workers, increased poverty and inequality, and negatively impacted social work education, prioritizing academic disciplines more responsive to the needs of neoliberal regimes (Strier, 2019). A movement for evidence-based practice in social work is developing in its relationship with the field of medicine (Bochicchio et al., 2021). The current challenge for social work education and social workers is to build long-term partnerships among social work educational institutions, state social service agencies, and active client groups to address poverty; this is seen as a potential contribution to the profession's future (Strier, 2019). The need for social work with individuals

and communities affected by incidents of bias and extremist violence leads to an emphasis on fostering a willingness in social work students to take responsibility and resist oppression (Goode et al., 2021). Social workers should also not underestimate the importance of client documentation and case filing. Documentation is time-consuming, but it is an integral part of the professional work of a social worker, as it is necessary for the assessment of a client and the quality of service. Appropriate practices and documentation techniques should be an important part of university social workers' education (Mahajne & Meler, 2022; Sarhan & Tadam, 2020).

The field of social work recognizes the importance of place in shaping community identities, constructing shared meanings, and generating collective action, which is vital in the context of Israel's Jewish-Arab mixed cities. Shwartz-Ziv and Strier (2022) identify four main interrelated aspects of creating a place: the formation of the ethnocultural meaning of a place, managing the meaning of space in relations of power, constructing a contradictory meaning of space, and framing the history of a place. The practice of social work in Arab communities representing a national minority in Israel faces problems such as inadequate vocational training, insufficient knowledge of English as the international language of social work, the failure of local Arab authorities to recognize many social security needs, the role of social work in mitigating them, and the unique position of the Arab minority in the country (Jammal-Abboud, 2021; Mahajne et al., 2021). These specific problems of Arab communities are compounded by the fact that Arab social workers do not see the need to adapt their practices to the peculiarities of the host country (Mahajne et al., 2021), which should be paid attention to in the learning process. Among the problems social workers face in the Palestinian community in Israel, the main ones are professional, political, and gender issues. This is mainly true for female Palestinian social workers. Arab social workers learn strategies through social work training and from social workers who practice community service in Israel (Hardal-Zreik & Blit-Cohen, 2019; Mahajne & Meler, 2022).

Research into the relationship between the cultural identity of Arab social workers in Israel and their preferences for intervention has shown the prevalence of professional willingness of social workers to embrace strategies embedded in their own culture and society (Zoabi & Savaya, 2017). A qualitative study of the phenomenological tradition of religious Jews and religious Muslim Arabs studying social work in Israel has shown that their professional worldview is predominantly secular, despite ethnic, national, and religious differences (Ranz et al., 2020). Central to the professional practice of social work are ethical approaches, which in Arab countries have their own specifics. Therefore, the development of a code of ethics seems to be an important promising direction for developing social work as a profession in Saudi Arabia (Albrithen & Briskman, 2015; Sarhan et al., 2021).

For a profession committed to social justice and inclusiveness, respecting and celebrating difference, protecting the vulnerable, and helping those in need, the dominance of political forces, popular movements, and social attitudes that run counter to such values is cause for alarm. Intolerance, ranging from religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, and ideas/thoughts, is openly expressed in a wide variety of contexts around the world (Golightley, 2017). The innovative methods of field training used in the educational process develop the abilities of undergraduate students in social work, expand their opportunities for work in local communities, raise awareness of environmental issues, and are effective for independent student projects in the development of culturally competent practices (Al-Makhamreh et al., 2016). Global efforts to combat poverty, discrimination, racism, violence, oppression, and dehumanization demonstrate the link between human rights and social work (Becker, 2021).

Rights and obligations are two elements that determine the conditions for social work in the field, especially in the context of electronic customer service, in particular, the possibility of filing administrative claims through the electronic system (Al Adwan, 2020). In the context of the debate over the relationship between law and social work practice, the importance of

teaching, learning, and evaluating law in the training of social workers is emphasized (Braye et al., 2005). The conceptual basis of the approach to the study of law by future social workers in Western universities combines three main goals of teaching students. These are:

1. good knowledge of the law and the ability to apply it in practical situations,
2. a clear understanding of the ethical and moral aspects of applying the law in practice, and
3. a critical understanding of the role of law in promoting human rights and social justice (Smith, 2021).

Social work students' curricula focus primarily on areas that reflect aspects of the relationship between law and practice. These areas, in essence, represent different ways of organizing the necessary knowledge, skills, and values associated with the effective study of law, each of which prioritizes different aspects of the relationship. Inequality and poverty focus on structural aspects: politics, institutions, and the socio-political context associated with community work (Smith, 2021).

Activity and advocacy promote student participation in making changes and transitioning from theory to social work practices (Benson & Siciliano, 2021). The integration of human rights into the social work curriculum, which often remains controversial and fragmented and based on the interests of individual professors, shows the importance of attention to human rights in social work (Brantley et al., 2020) and gives a new impetus to action in the field of social justice as the basis of social work (Chiarelli-Helminiak et al., 2018). Rooting the concept of human rights is also particularly important for the social work curriculum in Arab countries in parallel with increasing social competencies for avoiding and resolving conflict situations (Quzack et al., 2021; Sarhan & Tadam, 2020).

Research infrastructure, research skills, and job satisfaction are essential factors in the higher education system to achieve successful results, of which spiritual intelligence is also essential (Upadhyay, 2017). In addition, students involved in volunteering are more likely to find work in their specialty, as they acquire knowledge of social work practice, communication skills, and professional experience that they can use in their future work (Profiroiu & Păceșilă, 2017).

Thus, in the scientific literature, the problem of social work in Arab communities is presented mainly in the context of the influence of the Western culture values on the Arab world. As for teaching social work, the problem of education in Arab communities has been revealed in the scientific literature relatively recently. At the same time, the authors note the discrepancy between the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean concerning the interaction of research and higher education policy (Nour, 2011). Arab and Islamic foundations supporting research are a very recent phenomenon; therefore, their number is limited, and basic institutional traditions are still developing in social work and social policy. They have their own "ideology" and their own experience, which is not the same as that of the West (Kandil, 1995). The Well-being Theory (PERMA Model) suggests five ways people can pursue happiness: an enjoyable life that maximizes positive emotions, a passionate life, a meaningful life, positive relationships, and achievement. According to some researchers (D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2016), the PERMA model effectively identified opportunities and challenges for intervention in the United Arab Emirates.

Ethnic stereotypes are essential for the development of social work in Arab communities because, in the Western political scientific literature of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Middle East was often described not only as authoritarian but also impervious to democracy, which was explained based on institutional, structural, and cultural factors (Sarhan et al., 2021; Tadam et al., 2021). Today's process of democratization in the Middle East is no longer limited

by entrenched Muslim and/or Islamist views on social and sexual mores and the political and social rights of women (El-Husseini, 2016). The Islamic progress of societies (Michalos, 2017) is manifested in the desire of states to improve the well-being and satisfaction of their citizens, which has a corresponding impact on both cultural structures (D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2016) and vectors of social work development. The focus of the social work training program on best practices in social work with individuals, families, and communities based on social justice and human rights shows that the coverage of human rights in coursework and hands-on learning is linked to students' perspectives and engagement (Quzack et al., 2021). Social work students need to be taught how to tackle complex social problems through human rights education, participation, and objectivity. Given the trends in the development of the post-pandemic society, it is necessary to promote the expansion of students' opportunities to change the paradigm in the profession (Quzack et al., 2021).

Based on the above-mentioned studies, the research question is what best practices and approaches to training social workers in Arab countries can be used from the practice of Western universities. To answer this question, one should take into account the peculiarities of the social, political, and ethnic situation of the Middle East and the Arab countries as a whole, noted by researchers, and the differences in the practice of university teaching. Therefore, the research object was the process of teaching social work, and the subject was the development of social work education in Arab communities. The research aim was to study the features of teaching social work in Arab communities. The study objectives were to analyze scientific literature data on the formation of professional social work in Arab communities, identify the most important vectors of social work in Arab communities, and show the need to form curricula and programs for social work based on the unity of theory and practice.

Methodology

This study analyzed the scientific literature on teaching social work and its specifics in Arab communities, selected universities for comparative analysis, looked at their curricula and programs on social work, formulated conclusions, and presented practical recommendations. The study was conducted at the College of Humanities and Sciences, Ajman University, United Arab Emirates. Like the university as a whole, the college provides continuing education, high-quality academic programs and services, and research opportunities for faculty and students. The training of graduates in the specialty "social work" aims to develop their professional competencies, theoretical knowledge, and practical skills necessary for solving social problems and adapting scientific research to serve society. College students become acquainted with sociology and social services' theoretical foundations, principles, and methods; they master social work practices. The preparation aims to help students acquire the qualifications of leaders in social work, work in various social institutions, and develop and implement social security and social research policies. Students are taught how to diagnose and solve social problems through critical thinking and acquire skills in organizing research and writing research papers in sociology and social services.

The training aims to prepare responsible and highly qualified graduates to participate in the nation-building process, promote research in relevant areas of specialization, and provide public services through various events and specialized consultations. As a result of training, students acquire such professional skills and competencies as the ability to:

- analyze and interpret social phenomena and offer solutions;
- use critical and creative thinking when proposing solutions to problems;
- prepare and design social research;
- perform work and managerial duties in social institutions and organizations;

- apply self-criticism and comply with ethical principles related to the field of sociology and social work;
- design and implement social protection policies;
- work in a team.

The Ajman University is a pioneer in integration, innovation, and social impact, contributing to global learning and international integration. However, there are no separate disciplines on legislation, although knowledge of jurisprudence basics is an essential competence for social workers.

Comparison in scientific research is the most traditional method for comparing facts and phenomena according to specific criteria. The comparative research method was used due to the need to compare the undergraduate study programs in social work across nations to highlight common and distinctive characteristics of these programs. In addition to the comparative method related to empirical methods and those aimed at studying specific phenomena (in this case, comparing the curricula for teaching social work to undergraduate students), the method of theoretical analysis and generalization of scientific literature and curriculum data was used.

Several steps were taken to conduct this comparison. First, universities were selected that teach students in the specialty "social work" from a general list of universities in the United Arab Emirates, Europe, Asia, and the United States. This list included xxx universities. Then 13 universities were randomly selected from this list using a simple randomization method to compare the undergraduate degree programs in social work at these universities and at Ajman University. The selection method was based on a simple computer program that selects a certain number of random numbers from a given list. This selection process resulted in twelve universities. See Table 1 below.

Table 1

List of Universities

University	Nation
Ajman University	Ajman, United Arab Emirates
Charles Darwin University	Darwin, Australia
East-West University	Chicago, Illinois, The United States
ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute	Lisbon, Portugal
Klaipėda University	Klaipėda, Lithuania
London Metropolitan University	London, England, United Kingdom
Mykolas Romeris University	Vilnius, Lithuania
Ryerson University	Toronto, Canada
Swansea University	Swansea, Wales, United Kingdom
United Arab Emirates University	Al Ain, The United Arab Emirates
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos	Madrid, Spain
Universiti Utara Malaysia	Sintok, Malaysia
University of Leon	Leon and Ponferrada, Spain
University of the Free State	Bloemfontein, South Africa

Social work curriculum and approach to learning from a proposed list of universities were compared to obtain data on the characteristics of social work training in the United Arab Emirates. However, the study had five limitations. First, only undergraduate programs in social work were compared, and master's programs were not considered. Second, online social work courses, which were developed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were not studied. Third, the student populations were not compared by gender, age, or ethnicity. Fourth, the forms of government of states and the peculiarities of social policy were not studied. Fifth, only freely available data were used.

Ethical issues assumed equal treatment and non-discrimination on ethnic, racial, gender, and other grounds. The authors compared only data from documents (curricula and undergraduate programs) without directly interviewing respondents, so there was no need to obtain informed consent. The Ajman University's Research Ethics Committee (REC) monitored ethical compliance throughout the study. There were no conflicts of interest in the study, and no funding was provided.

Results

The authors randomly selected several universities with undergraduate social work programs to compare the social work curricula and programs of these universities and Ajman University. These university programs are described as follows.

At Klaipeda University, Lithuania, the bachelor's degree program in social work focuses on developing students' knowledge and skills (Holtzhausen et al., 2009) and learning fundamental rules of social work. The curriculum includes courses in psychology, medicine, sociology, management, philosophy, social policy, and human rights. Among the content areas are:

- knowledge of human rights in the context of social justice;
- knowledge of the essence and values of social work;
- other special, personal, and social abilities.
- the ability to conduct research and interpret data;
- the functioning of the state and economic systems;
- the processes of socialization of the individual;
- understanding ethical responsibility towards clients; and
- understanding research methodology.

Many universities in Canada offer social work training. One is Ryerson University, Canada, the undergraduate social work curriculum includes legal-focused disciplines such as:

- change;
- children and family;
- human rights;
- social work and the law; and
- youth and social justice.

The University of the Free State is located in Bloemfontein, the heart of South Africa. The modules of the bachelor of social work program include:

- clinical work;
- diversity;

- social work with communities and individuals;
- theory; and
- welfare law.

Portugal is one of the leaders in developing social work in Europe. At ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute, the study of the "Social Law" discipline aims to acquaint undergraduate social work students with the general principles of law and other aspects of regulation related to the social responsibility of the state and the values of social solidarity of the community. They are taught how to perceive and understand the interactions between state, community, and law from a global perspective. Students also explore the major subfields of social law to identify content relevant to the purpose of social services. The curriculum in the undergraduate social work program includes modules aimed at studying the legal aspects of social work, such as:

- international law as a body of social regulation;
- introduction to state, society, and law;
- legal regime of maternity protection;
- social constitution; and
- systems of social protection.

Charles Darwin University in Darwin, Australia, directs its students to initiate and support social change to create a more socially just society. The Bachelor of Social Work course is a four-year full-time program consisting of core, general, and optional modules. The courses include sections on:

- ethical rights and social justice;
- legal issues and aspects of social policy; and
- social work, psychology, and sociology.

At Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania, the goal of social work education is to build the ability to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable population segments within the framework of the law. Accordingly, the bachelor's degree program in social work includes modules such as:

- international human rights protection;
- protection of the rights of the child;
- socialization of children and youth;
- social policy; and
- social practice in the community.

East-West University, Chicago, Illinois, the United States, trains students of different backgrounds, ethnic groups, and religions to participate in the life of the world community and prepares professionals for social work. The Bachelor of Social Work curriculum provides students with the opportunity to pursue specialized professional programs in various fields, including law and criminal justice. Among the areas of concentration are:

- environment of the community;
- crime, society, and social justice;
- issues in welfare; and
- society and culture.

The University of Leon in Spain is a public higher education and research institution founded as an autonomous entity in 1979. It consists of two campuses in the cities of Leon and Ponferrada. The bachelor's program in social work includes the following:

- conceptual framework of social services;
- conceptions of human and human rights;
- interculturality, religions, and visions of reality;
- foundations of law for social work;
- social structure and social processes; and
- social politics and social work.

Another Spanish university, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, views the training of social workers as a complex process. The curriculum of which includes subjects such as:

- comparative systems of social work;
- cultural and social anthropology;
- family environment in social work;
- foundations of personal and family law;
- fundamentals of labor law and social protection; and
- international protection of human rights from the perspective of social work.

The United Kingdom has a long tradition in social work education. At London Metropolitan University, the BA in Social Work includes:

- defining and critically analyzing the main provisions, rules, and guidelines related to social work;
- a critical assessment of the law as it applies to children, families, and vulnerable groups;
- critical understanding of the law in the context of anti-discrimination practice; and
- social law studies.

Swansea University, in Swansea, helps students develop their social curiosity and explore contemporary social issues related to equality, discrimination, and oppression. The curriculum includes the following topics:

- discrimination and rights;
- equality, discrimination, and oppression;
- health law;
- human rights law;
- legal aspects of social work;
- legitimation and its role in discrimination and oppression; and
- English legal system.

The number of social work faculties is not as large in Asian region as in Europe and America because this direction is relatively new in this region and is associated with the development of more democratic processes and increased attention to ensuring the welfare and quality of life of the population. The College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia offers a wide range of educational programs in social work. Students study:

- Ethics and the law in the helping profession;
- Human behavior;
- Cultural diversity and human needs;
- Religion and social welfare;
- Social issues and policy;
- Social work with children, adolescents, and the aged; and
- Society, poverty, and welfare programs.

The United Arab Emirates University is the oldest university in the United Arab Emirates; it was founded after independence from Britain by the President and Founding Father of the UAE, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan in 1976. UAE University prepares Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) following global standards of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The program is based on:

- Islamic principles of social solidarity, cooperation, and mutual assistance;
- the traditional Arab Muslim family and multicultural expatriates;
- the theory and origin of human rights; and
- the nature and origin of the human rights concept, and its application at all levels of modern society.

The analysis of the curricula and programs of various universities teaching social workers has shown that in most of them, sufficient attention is paid to the issues of students' legal training. In almost all randomly selected universities in various countries and continents, where there is a bachelor's degree in social work training, law and human rights issues are included in the curriculum. At universities in Britain and Portugal, where social work has a long history and is at a high level of development, legislation issues are reflected in curricula and programs. The same can be said for the training of social workers at universities in Canada, where the profession is popular and where much attention is paid to the legal aspects of social work. In other countries, legal training for a bachelor's in social work is usually limited to one or two subjects and most often concerns the study of local legislation and issues of protecting the rights of the mentally ill. However, in European countries, curricula and programs are formed mainly based on the standards of the European Union, Bologna initiatives, and other pan-European approaches. They are focused on state standards and global trends in the American continent.

Many universities offer curriculum elements focusing on anthropology, psychology, sociology, ethnology, and human behavior. These courses should enhance the social competence of future social workers and prepare them to work in a complex multicultural and religiously diverse environment. There are no similar best practices at the Ajman University, but they are clearly needed.

Teaching social work in Arab communities is an urgent area of educational activity that should be based on the unity of theory and practice but should also consider ethnocultural and religious characteristics and form the necessary competencies of students in the field of legislation and law.

Discussion

A feature of social work education development in Arab countries is the combination of globalization processes and democratization of society with persistent conservative traditions of social relations and religious worldview. The aspect of international social work and the relationship of social work with religious beliefs remains poorly understood (Zoabi & Savaya,

2017). As the findings of the study show, a number of aspects of the training of social workers, which are normative for Western universities, are poorly represented in the Arab countries. This observation is consistent with other researchers (Alkaabi et al., 2020; Al-Makhamreh et al., 2016; Mahajne & Meler, 2022; Sarhan & Tadam, 2020).

Another problem is social work teachers' perception of educational program standards in Arab universities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf (Ibrahim, 2018). Religion is an integral part of life in Islamic countries such as Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), influencing education, practice, and social work policies (Sloan et al., 2017). There is a worldwide spread of social work education, which in Arab communities is happening both through Western universities opening international campuses and through local universities developing social work programs (Sloan et al., 2017). In countries that have recently gained independence, there is a fear of colonization (or re-colonization) through some curricula and textbooks with inappropriate ethnocultural influence, especially since most social work teachers are Western-educated and may lack the understanding of Arab communities' characteristics and have prejudice to the processes taking place in the Persian Gulf (Sloan et al., 2017).

Arab culture has deep historical roots and traditions, the conservative adherence to which is reflected in the educational process. For example, among the subjects studied by future social workers, one can find such disciplines: religion and Islamic philosophy, knowledge of which, although it is of general educational interest, is unlikely to help in practical social work. Nevertheless, such curricula, which seem illogical to Western specialists, reflect the traditional worldview of the East and correspond to the mentality of the local population, with which social work graduates in Arab communities will have to work. This aspect is highlighted by researchers (Holtzhausen et al., 2009) when comparing social work programs in Islamic countries like the Arabic countries with Western countries; they emphasize the importance of reflecting Islamic traditions and culture in educational programs. In contrast to the Western model, the approach to social work in Arab communities is based on a close relationship between politics and religion, reflecting the complex view of the world in Arab culture and forming the corresponding ethical standards (Holtzhausen et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, the development of professional social work in Arab countries is closely related to globalization processes and the influence of Western educational standards. In Arab countries, Western-style professional associations are being created, such as the Jordan Association of Social Workers, which is designed to promote the training and education of social workers, the development of their abilities, social and practical professional skills and promote the activation of social work and social roles in Jordanian society in all areas of social work (Al-Makhamreh et al., 2016; Mahajne & Meler, 2022). The profession of a social worker is traditionally defined as providing services to improve life opportunities in pursuit of social justice for individuals, groups, communities, and society as a whole (Brown, 2020). Social workers should be tolerant to clients, whoever they are, whatever communities they belong to (Levin-Keini & Ben Shlomo, 2017). They have to work in conditions of tense political reality, confrontation, fear, anger, and hatred (Kadan et al., 2017). Attempts to impose their own cultural stereotypes and prejudices cannot be the basis of successful social work, especially in conservative and religious Arab communities. As the study results show, the most important best practices for overcoming this difficulty are the implementation of courses that increase social competencies and courses in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and various human behavioral sciences.

Democratic processes in the Arab world are occurring with seeming inevitability, however, on the one hand, they have their own ethnocultural specificity, and on the other hand, they affect the transformation of these states' legislation in the direction of global trends. These features require a social worker to possess the appropriate professional competencies, among

which one of the leading is legal literacy (Benson & Siciliano, 2021). A social worker often has to plunge into the midst of conflicts occurring in communities or between communities that can be solved legally (Williams, 2016; Zoabi & Savaya, 2017). Therefore, the legal literacy of social workers is a necessary competence and should be supported by vocational training programs.

In Arab countries, the priority is to rely on national traditions. Students in Arab countries study Islamic culture, and much time is devoted to practical training (Sloan et al., 2017). As for Ajman University, the study of legislation is not singled out as a separate subject in the bachelor's program in social work. The present research shows that social work in Arab communities is challenging and requires high professionalism, knowledge of local culture, traditions, and customs, the ability to communicate in different languages, and respect for the religious views of the community. However, the need to resolve problematic issues and conflict situations in the legal field, provide legal assistance to the most vulnerable population groups, protect the rights of national minorities, and many other professional tasks make it necessary to study the legal aspects of social work, which must be reflected in curricula and programs (Sarhan & Tedam, 2020).

Conclusions and Practical Recommendations

A study of social worker training programs at 12 randomly selected Western universities and one Arabic university shows significant differences in the content of the programs. These differences may be indicative of best teaching practices that can be incorporated and implemented in Arab universities to address a number of pressing social work issues in many Arab countries. The most important of them, as the study findings show, is the need to strengthen the legal literacy of social workers and inculcate a deeper understanding of human rights as a basic approach to their professional activities. The second factor is the development of social communicative competencies based on courses related to the study of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and human behavior. This approach allows Arabic countries to overcome the problems associated with working in multiethnic and multireligious communities with severe political and military conflicts. Changing teaching practices in Arab universities can successfully draw on the characteristics of traditional Arab and Muslim learning culture and religious values.

European university undergraduate social work programs include the study of law. A significant place in social work education programs at universities in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Portugal is occupied by disciplines focused on studying law and human rights, which are included in various modules over several semesters. In many countries, social work training includes modules or individual disciplines to study the legal aspects of providing assistance to the most vulnerable population segments: children, youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, and, especially, people with mental health problems. Social work training prepares students for participation in the life of the global community and provides them with the opportunity to pursue specialized professional programs in various fields, including law and criminal justice. The bachelor of social work curricula at European universities also includes labor law and international human rights protection.

The problem with teaching social work in Arab communities is that Western school teachers most often carry out teaching, which often creates discrepancies in understanding values. In addition, if the Western world in the formation of educational programs is guided by global or regional standards, then in the Arab communities, there is no single standard. Curricula and programs are most often based on traditional fundamental education. Therefore, even though the main courses in social work are more or less the same, sometimes they include individual subjects that do not fully meet the tasks of forming the professional competencies of social workers, and not all Arab universities that train bachelors of social work pay due attention

to legal issues. If at UAE University students study the theory of human rights and its application at all levels of modern society on a global scale, then at Ajman University, jurisprudence is not reflected in educational plans and programs. The present research confirms the importance of reflecting Islamic traditions and culture in curricula and programs and shows that the development of professional social work in Arab countries is closely related to globalization processes and the influence of Western educational standards. Attempts to impose alien cultural stereotypes and prejudices cannot be the basis for successful social work, especially in conservative and religious Arab communities.

Democratic processes in the Arab world are occurring with seeming inevitability. However, they have their own ethnocultural specificity. On the other hand, they affect the transformation of these states' legislation toward global trends. These features require a social worker to possess the appropriate professional competencies, among which one of the leading is legal literacy. Therefore, the legal literacy of social workers is a necessary competence and should be supported by vocational training programs. The current research shows that social work in Arab communities is challenging and requires high professionalism, knowledge of local culture, traditions, and customs, the ability to communicate in different languages, and respect for the religious views of the community. The need to resolve problematic issues and conflict situations in the legal field, provide legal assistance to the most vulnerable population groups, protect the rights of national minorities, and many other professional tasks make it necessary to study the legal aspects of social work, which must be reflected in curricula and programs. Thus, teaching social work in Arab communities is an urgent area of educational activity; it should be based on the unity of theory and practice, consider ethnocultural and religious characteristics, and create the necessary legal competencies of students. Improvement of curricula and social work programs following international standards of the profession, taking into account the ethnocultural and religious characteristics of the Arab world, will provide the Arab communities with highly qualified professional social workers.

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Data availability

Data will be available on request.

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