Increasing The Employability Of Social Workers Through The Research Project

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Abstract

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The aim of the research is to evaluate the project's impact on the employability of social workers. The project was made to increase the population's accessibility in the labor market at a regional level.

The objective of the research is to analize the impact of the project by forming competences to access the self-services.

The methodology of research is using assessment instruments of project intervention. We developed a forming course for the students specialized in Social Work. To find the efficiency of the course program we implemented, we made a research on two samples: one of students from the third year of Social Work study program, and one of students from the second year in Master Program of Social Work. The first group was taught to use online platform for job market, according to new course created by us. The second group was deprived of this support. Both groups were comprised of 35 subjects. After the graduation we tried to see the efficiency of the course in terms of finding a job faster and more adequate. The instruments used for this purpose were: Questionnaire for identifying the training need 2015 – 2016; Focus groups and the SWOT analysis regarding the training activity at the university for students.

The final result consists in the analysis of the project's impact on the employability of social workers, by forming the competences of accessing the self-services of the research project.

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Keywords: Employability; Social workers; Workplace; Forming course; Research project.

1. Introduction

In the socio-economic context of the West and Northwest regions, to which is added a disadvantaged demographic dynamics of the economic growth; it becomes necessary to adapt the employment services to the new conditions, requested by the customers of these services and by the employers' (www.spunespo.ro).

The social and economic dynamics registered at a national level led to important changes in the Romanian educational system (*2000). As the society and technology has evolved, it has become increasingly important to have competences in this domain and to learn performing work skills (Beck & al., 1997). An essential role in finding a job is how students and graduates with knowledge in accessing the available jobs in the labor market (Gavrilă-Ardelean & Moldovan, 2014).

The labor market has changed, new types of activities that keep up with technical developments have appeared, but the education process remained the same (Cerghit, 1997). The educational institutions need to respond to new challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technology, by introducing in the educational process some IT programs and some software specialized in social work for accessibility in a specialized job (Ellis & al., 1994). The simple fact that technology accompanies us everywhere is a good reason to try to change the way young people and adults assimilate the information provided during classes. Aimed at facilitating the access to information and to courses, the interactive courses, based on specialized software programs, have significantly improved the acquired performances and understanding the content of the attended disciplines.

Young people represent the future of the society, which is important that they acquire the necessary skills in a society based on consumption (Lucuţ & Rădulescu, 2000). Since technology can be a source of attention distraction, specialized IT programs, implemented to help finding quickly and easily a job in the domain of social work have the purpose to offer to the university graduates, an interactive, rich and varied experience, while they become more informed (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

2. Research issues

The research issue is to analyze the project's impact on employability of the social workers, by forming the accessing competences of the self-services of the research project (www.spunespo.ro & www.wall-street.ro), we developed a forming course for the students specialized in Social Work, in order to, at the moment of graduation, they can find quickly and easily a workplace in the Social Work field (Bîrzea & al., 2000; Oprea, 2016).

We made the analysis of needs (SWOT) in field of Social Work employability.

The objectiv is to form the accessing competences of the self-services of the research project.

Knowing the characteristics and needs of the study lot is an important step in organizing a training session, because, depending on the group's particularities, the training objectives will be established, the training program and the course materials will be elaborated and the necessary logistics and resources will be identified (Cerghit, 2001; Cucoş, 2002).

2.1. The lot of study

The lots of research are formed by 35 students in the last year, specialization Social Work and 35 students from the second year in Master Program of Social Work as a witness lot.

The selection of study groups was based on the SWOT analysis.

The lot is significant because it is made up of students of Social Work specialization in their final year, who will graduate in few months and are directly interested in finding a job. They were included in the study based on self-interest expression of finding a job in the field of their specialization.

2.2. Research methodology

The methodology of research is to develop a forming course for the students specialized in Social Work.

The first group of students was taught to use online platform for labor market, according to new course created by us. The second group of students was deprived of this support.

Both groups were comprised of 35 subjects. After the graduation we tried to see the efficiency of the course in terms of finding a job faster and more adequate.

To realize the analysis of the training needs, there were collected, by different research methodology instruments, data from students.

The instruments used for this purpose were (Cerghit, 2001; Bocoş, 2002; Boeru, 1995):

1. Questionnaire for identifying the training need, applied to 35 students at the Social Work study program;
2. Focus groups;
3. The SWOT analysis regarding the training activity at the university for students, the future graduates in the Social Work specialty.

After applying these instruments, the following training needs have resulted (Benware & Deci, 1984):

1. The need to develop the skills of using IT instruments and specific software to the access technologies of trainers in the department of Social Work;
2. The need of forming and developing the competences specific to teaching – learning by cooperation, using the alternative methots and teaching-learning activities;
3. The need of improving the colaboration between the students and the trainer;
4. The need of improving the work methods specific to the superior education, especially the methods regarding the access technologies, for the students in the specialization Social Work.

2.2.1. Initial evaluation of students

It is realized at the beginning of the training program to determine the training level of students, which are the deficiencies in the domain of the operation with access technologies and specific employability software. This way, the level of knowledge, competences and skills is identified in order to archieve the suggested objectives and, at the same time, by considering the initial needs/requests, the content of the course and the optimal training methods that will be established. Through the initial

evaluation the trainer is supported in planning the activity that is going to be elaborated (Anghel, 2000).

The initial evaluation will consist of:

– Applying a questionnaire about knowing the specific access technologies;

– The IT practical examination, which is designed to verify the level of knowledge of the participants regarding the Microsoft Office package and the software's, and special employability programs for easily finding a job in the domain of the social worker speciality. Depending on the results of the initial evaluation, the training contents, the used working methods and the time allocated to the content will be established.

The objectives of the training session are:

a) General objectives:

– facilitating the access to high quality education for the students, future graduates in the social work domain, stimulating them for a professional development, through a better correlation between the educational offer and the specific requirements of the local communities;

– increasing the stability and the quality of the workforce;

– the contribution to increase the social and professional insertion of the students, by stimulating their active participation in school and community life.

b) Specific Objectives:

– improving the standards of continuous training of the main final beneficiaries, including the adaptation of the continuous training programs to the specific needs;

– identifying and developing the necessary IT skills of the students to access the regional labor market through the network of the research project;

– improving the ability to use specific access technologies;

– realizing the importance of using alternative work methods in class to increase the attractiveness of the instructive- educational process.

3. Research results

Choosing the training methods

In choosing the training methods, considering that we are talking about a group of adults, we must consider a few principles (Anghel, 2000):

– Adults are concerned about the relevance of what they learn and want to know what is the added value of what they are learning;

– Adults are independent and are guided by their own will - the trainer should select examples and methods that are based on real life situations that happened to the participants, to help them in solving the specific encountered problems;

– Adults have a large life experience and a strong knowledge base, so the trainer can and should use examples provided by students to illustrate their ideas;

– Adults are independent and are guided by their own will, so generalities courses have to be avoided; the focus on specific problems, practical and specific speciality aspects is requested.

In this way, the training methods, adapted to train adults will be:

Trainer centered methods:

- Lecture / presentation;
- Demonstration.

Group centered methods:

- Questionnaire;
- Case Study;
- Simulation;
- Work group / small group work / discussion in large group;
- Brainstorming.

The required material facilities:

a. The course support materials – theoretical support that supports the student's course;

b. Materials for students – contain the exercises that will be given to the students (worksheets, interactive presentations or other types of materials exemplifying better a particular topic);

c. PPT presentations – they can be printed and given to the students to take notes during exposure;

d. The planning of the course – reprezents the plan of a course. It can be modified over time, while the course is being conducted, because of various elements that can occur;

e. Computer, projector;

f. The place where the training takes place – arranging the classroom, that depends on several factors:

- The number of participants;
- The subject/theme of the course, that helps encrease accessing the jobs on the labor market in the Western Region, through special softwares in the platform of the research project, in the social worker speciality;
- The size of the classroom;
- The possibility of the people that participate at the course to interract;
- The convenience of the participants.

3.1. Programming the training

Table 1. The modules of the training program.

The name of the module	Theory hours	Practice hours	Total hours
Module 1: Elements of accessing the labor market	4	6	10
Module 2: Access Devices	4	6	10
Module 3: Functioning	4	6	10
Module 4: Employing through the project	2	6	8
Evaluation			2
Total hours	12	24	40

Table 2. The graphic of the training program**.**

The name of the module	Theory hours	Practice hours
Module 1: Elements of accessing the labor market	Monday: 16-20	Tuesday: 14-20
Module 2: Access Devices	Wednesday: 16-20	Saturday: 8-14
Module 3: Functioning	Monday:16-20	Tuesday: 14-20
Module 4: Employing through the project	Wednesday: 16-18	Saturday: 8-14
Evaluation	Saturday: 9-11	
Total hours	14	24

3.2. Verifying the course efficacy

We made a research on two samples: one of students from the third year of Social Work study program, and one of students from the second year in Master Program of Social Work.

The first group was taught to use online platform for job market, according to new course created by us. The second group was deprived of this support. Both groups were comprised of 35 subjects. After the graduation we tried to see the efficiency of the course in terms of finding a faster and more adequate job.

The data obtained from our subjects reflected that: from the 35 graduated students from Social Work study program, 27 found a job in one month after the graduation. From the 35 graduated students from Master program only 10 found a job in one month, even they were more qualified than their colleagues.

Table 3 and figure 1 show the number of students who found a job in one month after the graduation.

Table 3. The number of subjects who find a job in one month after graduation

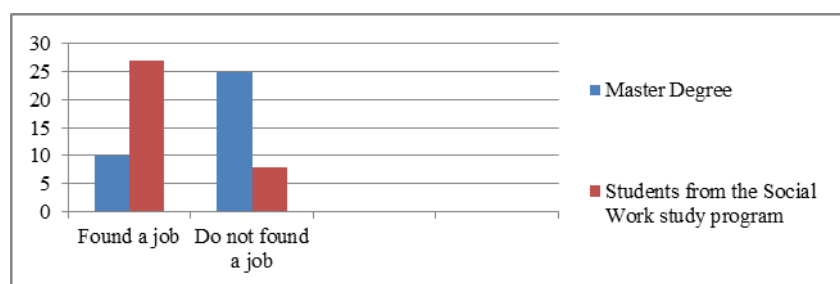| Items	Master Degree	Students from the Social Work study program
Found a job	10	27
Do not found a job	25	8

Fig. 1. The number of subjects who find a job in one month after graduation (Where: M.D. = Master Degree in Social Work and S.P. = graduated from study program of Social Work)

We tried to see if the differences between the two groups are significant in statistical terms. For this we used the formula of Hi square, as (1):

$$X^2 = \Sigma \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \tag{1}$$

For our samples the calculated value of Hi square is 14.56. Regarding the table of significations at the number of freedom degrees equal to 1, we found that our value for Hi square is significant at a statistical significance hold of p < .01.

Thus is demonstrated that the course that I created is more than useful for the students (from both categories – master degree or simple Study program degree), to find faster a job adequate to the competences that they have acquired over the years of study.

3.3. The final evaluation of the students

At the end of the course the following will be evaluated:

- The performance of the trainer;
- The quality and applicability of the course, the atmosphere, the organization;
- The knowledge and skills acquired by trainees.

The evaluation instruments that will be used are:

a. Questionnaire;

b. Discussions or group analysis;

c. Portofolio – to evaluate the accquired knowledge and skills.

The portfolio is a heuristic tool, being able to highlight the following skills:

- The ability to observe and manipulate information;
- The ability to reason and use knowledge;
- The ability to observe and to choose the work method;
- The ability to measure and compare the results;
- The ability to investigate and analyze;
- The ability to properly use the bibliography;
- The ability to synthesize and organize the material.

4. Conclusions

As a conclusion I propose the obligatory inclusion of this course in the study programs of Social Work (for both categories – Master Degree or simple Study Program Degree) because it was demonstrated the efficiency in finding a job in the field of Social Work.

Considering that the subject proposed for this course is *'Increasing the employability of social workers through skills training for self-service access to services research project'* it will be used the following interactive methods:

a. Study case;

b. Debates (collective discussions);

c. Exercises using the computer (in groups of 2 students);

d. Interpretation of results;

e. Practical activities.

In each module there will be realized a work folder for each student, with the required documents, to facilitate the dialogue and to be sure that after the course, the participants will be able to reflect further on the subject and will be able to discuss with the other students.

The portfolio will be evaluated by the trainer. When the trainee presents his portfolio, the evaluator usually realizes an interview with him, reviewing the annexed work, analyzing his attitude regarding his work, helping him to concentrate on the aspects that have to be improved. The trainer and the

trainees agree on the products that have to be included in the portofolio and that prove fulfilling the learning objectives. The evaluation of the portofolio contains an evaluation of each of the products included in the portfolio.

The educational institutions need to respond to new challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technology to increase the employment of the social workers, by forming the accessing competences of the self-services services of the research project. We developed a forming course for the students specialized in Social Work, in order to, at the moment of graduation, to find quickly and easily a proper job in the Social Work field.

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