

Teaching Poverty in Social Work Classroom: A Sri Lankan Perspective

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1 Introduction: Social Work in Sri Lanka and the Role of the National Institute of Social Development

Social work education in Sri Lanka dates back to the 1950s; however, it is inevitable to provide readers with a brief historical background to be familiarized with the underlying forces of Sri Lankan social work education, as social work is a nascent profession in Sri Lanka. It could be acknowledged that the documentation of social work activities in the Sri Lankan context has been taken place with the establishment of the Ceylon Institute of Social Work (CISW) in 1952 (Ranaweera, n, d.). Initially, the CISW was founded to provide training to the social service officers serving at government departments and the employees attached to the private welfare sectors. It also aims to promote professional social work in the country as the country faces many complicated social problems such as poverty, unemployment, child social problems, and homelessness. In order to meet the skills, knowledge, and attitude required for professional social workers, the CISW launched short-term training courses in Social Work Program to empower the local expertise and resource pool of social work with the support obtained from the United Nations (UN). A few years later, UN support was terminated, and the growing quest for social work education was highly felt. Its necessity was appreciated due to various challenges in the local context. This status quo urged the Sri Lankan government to take over the CISW under the Ministry of Social Service's purview in 1964, and the CISW was renamed 'Ceylon School of Social Work' (CSSW) (Ranaweera, n, d.).

For the first time in Sri Lanka's social work history, a two-year, English medium, full-time Diploma program in Social Work, was started in 1978. This was appreciated as a milestone in the development of social work in Sri Lanka. In 1991, by a Parliament Act, the CSSW was upgraded as the 'National Institute of Social Development' (NISD) under the Ministry of Social Service and Social Welfare Ministry. The NISD is now the only recognized Degree awarding higher learning institute, providing social work programs at Diploma, Bachelor, and Post Graduate levels in Sri Lanka. The NISD also gets involved in training public servants and non-governmental employees working in different social settings (Ranaweera, n.d.). Although some Sri Lankan public universities have started the diploma, bachelor, and Post Graduate programs in Social work education, the NISD is still enjoying the monopoly of being a highly successful and pioneering body in providing social work programs (Herath, n.d.). Therefore, the NISD has been the sole institute for professional social work education in Sri Lanka (Ranaweera, n.d.; Welikala, 2011).

2 Background of the Study

The social problems of the early period (immediately after Sri Lanka's independence) were related to poverty, old aged, unaccompanied children, and the disabled. To address these problems, the Sri Lankan government provided food subsidies and relief for the poor and ran residential care centers for the elderly, children, and the disabled. Social workers also played a significant role in these issues. Their intervention was to identify the recipients suited for this state assistance. So, the nature of the early period social issues was more individualized, and the social worker's response to them was remedial.

In the Sri Lankan context, though a professional code of ethics is absent, the NISD has been involved in a long-term commitment to educating its learners to deal with the problem of poverty from the time of its inception (Jayawardana, & Nanayakkara, 2018). One of the key objectives as prescribed by the Sri Lankan Professional Association of Social Workers

Sri Lankan Professional Association of Social Workers (SLPASW, n.d) also is to be determined to alleviate the poverty in the country through professional social work education. With regard to poverty alleviation, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2010) insists on the role of social work in poverty alleviation in addition to a specific responsibility to provide support to those in poverty.

The NISD is committed to producing professionals in the social work sector to meet the higher demand for trained manpower in the social work and social development field nationally and internationally since the 1950s. It offers certificate courses, High National Diploma programs, undergraduate and Post Graduate courses in social work. Since the NISD involves in teaching and training programs vigorously, it needs to incorporate some practical problems into the social work curriculum to be studied and innovative teaching ideas to keep the students' interest alive. It is also vital to design the syllabus more context specific. The institute is also bound to be committed to incorporating poverty and related social issues into its curriculum at various levels of its teaching programs. The NISD should be dynamic in nature to contest with traditional universities, university colleges, and private educational entities to maintain its professional status and the quality of its programs. Although the social work programs pave the path for employment opportunities and professional status for trained practitioners, it is not celebrated like other streams such as Science and Information Technology. It is also worth considering that the institute needs to maintain its uniqueness and autonomy by introducing more practical course units in its curriculum. In countries like Sri Lanka, a qualification in social work is a requirement for any occupation related to the service of the poor and disadvantaged living in all communities.

Poverty has been a long-term hurdle in the path to development in Sri Lanka. The liberal arts degrees not oriented to deal with crucial social problems such as poverty are becoming a burden to the nation's economy. In this context, this chapter intends to elaborate more on how the subject of poverty is incorporated into the social work curriculum. What kinds of methods are adopted for classroom teaching/learning and field activities? How are the students motivated to study these subjects and choose field activities on poverty? To what extent was it successful/what are the challenges and opportunities found in teaching and learning poverty subjects? This chapter further attempts to make recommendations on introducing more home-based and non-western oriented poverty subjects and outline how the proposed contents may be integrated into the curriculum to promote NISD's social work education to its next stage.

Before move onto the next section, the authors of this paper would prefer to provide the readers with some statistics on crucial social indicators of Sri Lanka to develop a comprehensive understanding of the country's social development situation. Tables 1-4 present the leading economic indicators for the period 2012-2019.

Table 1: Poverty Rate of Sri Lanka

| Sl no | Year | (%) |
|--------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 | 2010 | 8.9 |
| 2 | 2012 | 6.7 |
| 3 | 2013 | 6.1 |
| 4 | 2014 | 6.7 |
| 5 | 2016 | 4.1 |
| 6 | 2018 | 4.6 |
| 7 | 2019 | 5.1 |

Source: Statica.Com, 2019

Table 2: Gross Domestic Product of Sri Lanka

| Sl No | Year | USD (Billion) |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | 2012 | 68.44 |
| 2 | 2013 | 74.29 |
| 3 | 2014 | 79.36 |
| 4 | 2015 | 80.55 |
| 5 | 2016 | 81.79 |
| 6 | 2017 | 87.10 |
| 7 | 2018 | 88.90 |
| 8 | 2019 | 86.56 |

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019

Table 3: Per capita Income of Sri Lanka

| Sl no | Year | USD (1000) |
|--------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2012 | 3,351 |
| 2 | 2013 | 3,610 |
| 3 | 2014 | 3,821 |
| 4 | 2015 | 3,842 |

| | | |
|---|------|-------|
| 5 | 2016 | 3,380 |
| 6 | 2017 | 3,886 |
| 7 | 2018 | 4,079 |
| 8 | 2019 | 3,852 |

Source: Statista.com, 2019

Table 4: Unemployment Rate of Sri Lanka

| Sl no | Year | % |
|-------|------|------|
| 1 | 2013 | 4.5 |
| 2 | 2014 | 4.44 |
| 3 | 2015 | 4.67 |
| 4 | 2016 | 4.37 |
| 5 | 2017 | 4.18 |
| 6 | 2018 | 4.4 |
| 7 | 2019 | 4.32 |

Source: Statista.com, 2019

2.1 Method and Approach

A qualitative approach was used to collect appropriate information for this study. However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that relevant reading materials and conceptual framework in teaching poverty for social work students are almost non-existent in Sri Lanka. Based on an analysis of curricula, lecture notes, PowerPoint slides, exam papers and assignments, and formal discussions using guidelines with third-year BSW students and MSW students, educators, field agencies, and field supervisors, this research focuses on the unique challenges and opportunities expressed by different stakeholders, affiliated to the NISD in various capacities. The data analysis procedure was based on emerging themes from the collected data and literature review.

The analysis was next directed towards narrowing down the information into significant points or quotes. Firstly, the participants were sensitized about the whole research study. The objectives and the nature of the research were detailed to the participants before they were invited for the interview. In this research, participation was optional, and the participants were not given the impression that participation is compulsory.

2.2 Sample Selection and Size

A purposive sampling method was employed to identify the most suitable participants. A mixture of various stakeholders, including lecturers, field coordinators, students' supervisors, and students who follow Higher Diploma, Bachelor Degree, and Master of Social Work at the NISD were invited to contribute to this study by giving their invaluable perception concerning teaching poverty at the NISD. A total of five faculty/academic members, including two lecturers (01 senior and 01 assistant lecturer), one fieldwork coordinator, two faculty supervisors who guide fieldwork activities about poverty subject, and five students, including two Higher Diploma students, two BSW, and one MSW students were selected as the sample. In addition, two fieldwork supervisors and three agency supervisors also were chosen based on their convenience. Except for students, other selected experts have considerable experience

in the social work field. The sample size was confined to a small number, which was 15 in total.

3 The Rationale for incorporating Poverty Subject into the Social Work

In the 1990s, the manpower requirement in the welfare sector was estimated at around 6000. Since then, the population has increased by about five-million along with the problems and issues of internal migration to the cities from the rural villages. Nearly 30 - 40% of the country's population is living below the poverty line. The expansion of welfare and development programs in recent times has created a need for efficient manpower at both the field and management levels. Neither the traditional universities nor the private higher learning entities have attempted to cater to this need at a level commensurate with the skills required. Jobs in the formal welfare system, the non-governmental sectors, volunteer organizations, religious welfare, and business welfare may need a more trained workforce to deal with the challenges related to poverty. Overwhelming impacts of three decades-long ethnic conflict in the North and the East provinces also need more professional interventions to promote the psychosocial well-being of the war-ravaged societies. The key challenge faced by the internally displaced people, persons with disabilities (PWDs), former fighters, women-headed households, and traumatized personnel and their communities are acknowledged as poverty. Therefore, the social work curriculum should be tailor-made with classroom teaching and field activities (Chanrdarathne, 2002).

“In accordance with this commitment, there have been numerous pleas to place particular emphasis on the issue of poverty within the framework of social work training programs in South Asia” (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, & Monnickendam, 2009, as cited in Cox, Gamlath, & Pawar, 1997, p. 225). These attempts may be a consequence of social work scholars' concerns in the face of rising poverty rates in different countries.

3.1 Teaching and Integrating Poverty in Social Work at the NISD

As a monopoly institute in social work education in Sri Lanka, the NISD provides a combination of theoretical, conceptual, and field-based domains in poverty subject, intending to provide its students with firsthand experience concerning the poverty issues at micro, mezzo, and macro levels in the Sri Lankan context. Given this situation, a recent examination of the curriculum of the Higher Diploma, bachelor, and Postgraduate programs in social work offered by the NISD shows that only one course unit, which is Economics for Social Workers - BSW 313, is taught to impart the students with knowledge in the field of poverty in the second semester of 3rd year BSW. This course unit is also not fully allocated for poverty, and the course unit is taught with development perspectives. This course unit aims to describe and illustrate the development process, goals, and unforeseen consequences of development and the possible social work intervention strategies in reducing or addressing adverse effects of development for people, specifically marginalized groups and individuals in the society. It highlights the empirical evidence on the success of alternative poverty reduction strategies employed by each successive Sri Lankan government, since independence, at the regional and national levels (Bachelor of Social Work Hand Book, 2017-2021). The Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) upon completion of the course unit are to,

1. identify specific challenges related to poverty,
2. describe different aspects of poverty,
3. explain the strengths and weaknesses of varying development strategies implemented by Sri Lankan Governments to combat poverty, and

4. identify challenges faced by policymakers in alleviating poverty in Sri Lanka.

However, theories and key concepts are taught using western perspectives, and some of them are South Asian-based, such as Amarthiya Sen's thoughts on poverty. Classroom teaching in 3rd year apart, fourth-year students are encouraged to choose research about poverty-related challenges such as poverty in slums, urban poverty, rural poverty, poverty and women, youth poverty; the research areas are not confined to these and go beyond. When students need to carry out their Field Practicum-II community organization, they are motivated to consider their project work on poverty-related issues.

3.2 Previous and Present Course Contents of Economics for Social Workers - BSW 313

The course content is highly associated with development aspects, and it contains some titles on poverty. The sections related to poverty are,

1. Development perspectives and measurements: Economic development, social development, sustainable development through some key indicators such as PCI, GDP, GNP, PQLI, HDI, Poverty Index (PI), Misery Index (MI), and Happy Index (HI)
2. The impact of development: Cost, exploitation of resources, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality, growth of multi-national companies, global influence on national economies, and societies
3. Social work interventions for minimizing/controlling adverse effects: Social auditing, identifying vulnerable people, strengthening civil society, promoting self-help groups and CBOs, linking resources, promoting redistribution of resources, social policy initiatives, and lobbying and advocacy
4. Defining poverty and the different approaches to poverty, Measuring poverty, poverty line and social indicators, causes of poverty, demand and supply, vicious cycle (Education, Health, Social Services, Disaster, Gender inequality, and intergenerational poverty), and Multi-dimension of poverty (Rural poverty, Urban poverty, and Estate poverty)
5. Theories focused on economic growth and development
6. Different strategies in poverty reduction (Infrastructure Development, Technology including ICT, Regional Development strategies, and Sectoral Development strategies)

The Poverty subject was an elective unit until 2013, and the subject was taught in the 2nd-year second semester and 3rd-year first semester. A total of 90 hours was allocated for each semester. However, it was modified based on the suggestions of a team of experts of APASWE and IASSW, which reviewed the curriculum in 2013. They merged the two units as a one-course unit, namely "Economics for Social Workers BSW-313," and reduced the credit hours from 90 to 45 hours. The team of experts opined that the previous course units were highly related to economics and development-oriented, and hardly deal with the domains of poverty. The curriculum development committee also accommodated the recommendations of team of experts and amended the syllabus. The previous course unit highly emphasized on field visits and firsthand experiences. The students who opted to learn this course unit were provided with several opportunities to visit poverty-stricken areas in the South, North-West, Central, and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. They got many exposures to directly observe the poverty alleviation initiatives such as "Reawakening of the East" (*Negenahira Navodaya*),

Northern Spring (*Uthuru Wasanthaya*), Crown to the Nation (*Dayata Kirula*), and *Samurdhi* (Prosperity) Programs implemented by the government and livelihood programs and self-help group activities initiated by the local, national, and international level non-governmental organizations. The students could learn through interviewing individuals faced with poverty-related challenges and the steps they take to tackle them. Space was allocated in the curriculum for the students to link the needy people with appropriate resources and service providers. Both course units were designed to deliver some basic concepts and theories related to development and poverty. The key aspects included in the previous course units were development perspectives and measurements: economic development, social development, sustainable development through some key indicators such as PCI, GDP, GNP, PQLI, HDI, Poverty Index (PI), Misery Index (MI), and Happy Index (HI). These key concepts apart, some crucial theories, including neo-classical theories, neo-liberal theory, and Rostow's Five Stages of Development, were also discussed under these course units. The poverty-related problems were considered as social aspects, and they were connected to micro, mezzo, and macro-level social work intervention during the students' field placements (BSW Curriculum, 2009-2013).

As for the assessment, both prospective course units were assessed for 100 marks. The method of assessment consists of an assignment on a given topic and oral presentation (20 marks), mid-semester examination (20 marks), and end semester examination (60 marks). However, students could use any innovative method for their assignments and presentations within the given space and time and have their presentations individually or as a group.

3.3 Methods of Teaching

The teaching method involves several approaches, such as direct lecture delivery, group discussions, and screening video clips. At times, the subject in-charge would invite experts from the reputed educational and research institutes in poverty, such as the Center for Poverty Analysis and professors and senior academics in poverty and development from the University of Colombo. The experts' assistance was obtained for exam paper moderation (V. Jeyaruban, Subject in-charge, personal communication, August 29, 2019).

3.4 Positive aspects of Economics for Social Workers - BSW 313

Apparently, the theoretical aspects and the concepts discussed under this subject are the latest and highly informative to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subject. This unit could help students to build conceptual and theoretical perspectives concerning poverty in the global and local contexts. This theoretical base is applicable by the students when they are attached to agencies, groups, or communities for their practical learning.

3.5 Human Settlements and Service Delivery - BSW 324

Another course unit connected to poverty aspects is Human Settlements and Service Delivery - BSW 324. This subject is offered in the second semester of the 3rd year BSW. This course has two parts. The first part explains the important concepts related to human settlements and provides an overview of the causative factors that determine the evolution of human settlements in Sri Lanka. The second part is a practical exposure related to the service delivery systems in Sri Lanka, and it is expected to allow the students to develop the skills required to evaluate actual service delivery situations in a selected administrative area called Divisional Secretariat Division. Three credits are allocated for this course, with 105 hours of field practice hours, within which 15 hours are allocated for classroom instructions and the remaining 90 hours for field practicum; this unit receives two credits.

After completing 15-hour classroom teaching, students are taken to a Rural Camp, jointly organized by the faculty field coordinator and social work academia in collaboration with agency supervisors and field supervisors. These rural camps are mostly organized by considering rural poverty, challenges faced by the rural population in receiving services, and challenges faced by different service providers in delivering the services. The students are expected to attend a 10-day rustic camp equated to 90 hours/two credits. It exposures students to rural life, problems, and issues related to social development, and enables them to organize a camp and study the community needs to implement selected programs at the Divisional secretariat level. The rural camp exposure helps students to inculcate participative, reflective, and analytical skills in their learning (BSW Curriculum, 2017-2021).

Students will stay in the villagers' homes during the camp of need assessment, sharing their daily lives to assess service delivery. They will also pay a visit to community-based organizations and other organizations working with poverty-related issues in the areas. After the assessment, a one-day workshop is organized to present the divisional level coordinating committee findings. During this presentation, the presenters will highlight the gap between the need and services. The authorities are expected to explain the actions they have taken so far to handle poverty issues. They will be furnishing information on the number of *Samurdhi* beneficiaries and people who obtained livelihood assistants in a certain period, details of beneficiaries who received free housing financial assistance, and employment opportunities created by their respective units. Finally, the students will prioritize the activities with relevant officers to deliver services/organize social work interventions in collaboration with local service delivery organizations to initiate poverty alleviation activities.

Feedback is received from community members and other service providers on the last day of service delivery. They believe that obtaining feedback would help the service providers to review their practices, and community members also may conceive an idea on the kinds of relevant services available and whom to contact for services to promote their livelihood activities or obtain appropriate services.

3.6 Course Contents of BSW 324 - Human Settlements and Service Delivery

Under this course unit, the following contents are discussed in classroom lectures. Though these course contents are not directly connected to poverty and its related issues, many titles pave the path to discuss poverty and related topics. The course unit starts with an introduction to human settlements (Definitions, Types, Patterns, and Functions of settlements).

1. Urban and rural settlements with particular reference to Sri Lanka.
2. Planned settlements in Sri Lanka.
3. E.g., Settlement schemes in the dry zone and the impact of planned settlements.
4. Spontaneous settlements and Encroachments.
5. Changing residential patterns in urban and rural settlements.
6. The inter-sectorial service delivery models and other approaches relevant to integrating and coordinating services at different levels.
7. The roles of the state sector, the private sector, the community, and NGOs in human settlements.
8. The role of the Social Worker in human settlements.

The Intended Learning Outcomes of the course units seem to be relevant to poverty issues in the Sri Lankan context as it investigates some of the critical issues of human settlements in Sri Lanka; for instance, when the students are expected to understand human settlement planning and its impacts on societies. It is essential to analyze the livelihood activities and their effects on their income level. Therefore, understanding the patterns of human settlements in Sri Lanka would help students to discover the impact of poverty on the patterns of human settlements. Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to

1. understand the central concepts of human settlements and their development,
2. understand human settlement planning and its impacts on society,
3. elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of the service delivery systems, and
4. acquire the necessary practical experience to understand and assess human settlements and service delivery systems.

Table 5: Teaching Poverty Subjects at the NISD in a Nutshell

| Subject | Course Level | Domains of Study |
|---|--|--|
| Economics for Social Workers - BSW | BSW - 313 3 rd Year First sem. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content associated with key indicators: PCI, GDP, GNP, PQLI, HDI, Poverty Index, Misery Index, and Happy Index • The impact of development: Cost, Exploitation of resources, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality, growth of Multi-National Companies, Global influence on national economies • Social work interventions for minimizing adverse effects • Defining poverty and the different approaches to poverty • Theories focus on economic growth & development • Different strategies in poverty reduction |
| Human Settlements & Service Delivery- BSW | BSW- 324 3 rd Year Sec. sem. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The livelihood activities & its impacts on the income level of different settlements • The effect of poverty on the patterns of human settlements • Potential role of a social worker with different settlements |
| Understanding Sri Lankan Society-MSW | MSW 504 1 st Year First sem. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical perspective to understand contemporary Sri Lankan society • Sri Lankan culture & social structure, understanding the socio-economic & political changes & impact on Sri Lankan society • Understanding of major social issues such as poverty in contemporary Sri Lanka |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Globalization and Social Welfare – MSW | MSW-507 1 st Year Sec. sem. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of the dismantling of economies on welfare states & crisis due to poverty • Social welfare & globalization & poverty • International Aids & the elements of poverty issues. • Inequality in the world, social welfare in the global context, the nature of the new world, borderless finances & borderless labor, the global rich & the local poor, economic rationalism & domestic welfare |
|--|---|---|

Source: BSW & MSW Handbooks, 2013/2017& 2018/2019

4 Challenges for Teaching and Learning the Poverty Subject

The academic members attached to the NISD acknowledged that the time and credits allocated are not sufficient for the amended curriculum subjects. In the new curriculum, only 45 hours are allocated, and the fieldwork component has been removed due to the lack of financial support and the institutional arrangements. After receiving the experts' comments, the tutorial hours have been reduced in 2013, which dramatically impacted the quality of teaching and learning aspects of poverty subject in social work. It is noteworthy that the field activities are reduced tremendously, which has demotivated the teaching and learning activities of academic members and students. Under this context, the existing social work education programs of the NISD address problems of poverty and social exclusion in an extraordinarily superficial manner as the weightage of the field component has been considerably reduced. Now, inviting external resources is not in practice, and junior lecturers are asked to be co-facilitators during the lecture sessions. They are supposed to conduct classes when the subject in-charge is available for lectures. Connecting poverty issues to social work intervention have become more challenging, and contextualizing poverty is also difficult with the existing curriculum. Apart from these challenges, the academic members who teach the poverty subject are not equipped with additional training or field exposure. They consider this subject as one of the course units in Social Work. This course is also not well-grounded on the critical issues to be tackled by social workers in the Sri Lankan context. Moreover, lecturers who wish to teach the topic of poverty, and particularly practice with people living in poverty, find that the existing literature does not offer a comprehensive discussion of the issue. Questions such as 'what are the expected goals of teaching poverty to social workers?' and 'what should be the contents of the subject of teaching poverty?' are left unanswered in the teaching and learning activities.

4.1 Teaching Poverty Courses in the MSW Program and its Challenges

The Master's degree program in social work conducted by the NISD aims to produce professionally qualified and managerially competent manpower to serve the social welfare system and thereby promote the country's social development. The primary objective of the Master's program in Social Work is to meet the demand in public and private sectors for upgrading the competencies of graduates/other equally qualified individuals already engaged in social work and provide opportunities to graduates from other disciplines and other similarly qualified personnel to obtain advanced knowledge in social work, to meet the urgent need for professional social workers in the country at the managerial level. Therefore, the objectives of the program are to create a managerial level or administrative level workforce in social work to promote the country's social development. It is further revealed that the majority of the course units are designed to provide information and develop the existing knowledge-base of the social worker.

Upon successful completion of the master's degree program in Social Work, the participants will be equipped with,

1. A critical understanding of the body of knowledge and research in social work,
2. Analytical and conceptual skills leading to the production of knowledge in social work and social development,
3. Advanced knowledge in social work related to organizational, managerial strategies, and
4. Academic and professional skills required to perform as managers, planners, and policymakers in social work, social welfare, and social development.

The program consists of classroom lessons, including lectures, discussions, student presentations, seminar discussions, and observation visits of selected social and related organizations study. It also includes lessons on leadership appropriate to professional practitioners and persons in managerial positions. The teaching methods do not preferably incorporate field activities to impart knowledge on poverty and practical aspects in the field of poverty needed to the social workers hired for managerial level positions. The MSW students opined that the field exposure is limited to administrative and knowledge-based domains. Most students following the MSW degree are attached to various governmental and non-governmental organizations, and this prevents them from actively participating in teaching and learning, particularly in intensive field activities. The curriculum development committee has considered this issue seriously and developed the curriculum to cater to the practical concerns of the students who follow the program at the NISD. The classroom lectures are conducted during weekends. For the field practicum modules, a minimum of 80% attendance is compulsory during the stipulated hours of study. Therefore, the employed may be required to obtain leave of absence from their workplaces during such periods. This requirement sounds really challenging for students who prefer to choose field practice related to poverty. They acknowledged that "though we prefer to work with an organization that works on poverty alleviation, we cannot do so as the administrative procedures are very rigid in granting official approval for leave to carry out their field practice." Therefore, choosing an inspiring field practice to enhance their knowledge in the field of poverty is unmanageable. However, some subjects taught in the MSW contain poverty-related aspects, and the subjects that discuss poverty-related aspects in the MSW curriculum are presented below.

4.2 Globalization and Social Welfare - MSW 507

This course unit describes how a new international economic order challenges the nation's old welfare structures and how the globalization forces entirely swamp the developing countries. This course unit further discusses how the welfare states undergo a crisis because of the dismantling of economic resources. Some main themes of the course unit, such as Social Welfare and Globalization and Poverty and International Aids, contain the elements concerning poverty issues. They are the inequality in the world, social welfare in the global context, the nature of the new world, borderless finances and borderless labor, the global rich and the local poor, economic rationalism, and domestic welfare. According to the students, these themes are highly theoretical and do not deal with the ground reality of the country's poverty situation. In addition, international aid and the Bretton Woods institutions; WTO, GATT, IMF, WB, ADB, structural adjustment, and the role of surplus capital; poverty in the Third World, and the global response are also discussed in the classroom. These conceptual ideas are not relevant to their practical world, and no space is available to apply them in real world practice. Therefore, they perceive themselves as incompetent in dealing with poverty

issues even at the individual level. Hence they find it difficult to obtain opportunities to work with people who face challenges due to poverty.

4.3 Understanding the Sri Lankan Society - MSW 504

As students of MSW should have a good understanding of the Sri Lankan society, this course unit attempts to introduce the students to major studies on different areas related to Sri Lankan society.

This course unit is designed to provide the following: a good historical perspective to understand contemporary Sri Lankan society, a knowledge on Sri Lankan culture and social structure, an understanding of the socio-economic and political changes and impact on Sri Lankan society, and an understanding of major social issues in the contemporary Sri Lankan society (MSW Handbook, 2018/2019). One of the Intended Learning Objectives of the course unit is that the students will be able to analyze the roots, causes, contexts, and trends of social issues, including poverty and related social problems. Under this course unit, theoretical perspectives such as understanding poverty, poverty in the context of urban and rural settings, and feminization of poverty are discussed in detail. This course does not consider practical aspects such as pocket disparities of poverty between the Sri Lankan cities and villages, and hence, students expressed ambiguity about the usefulness of the proposed course unit contents.

5 In-course assessments and Examinations

As mentioned under the assessment criteria, in-course assessments are critical in the evaluation process. Still, independent scrutiny of a mid-term take-home assessment shows that the question is not relevant to the poverty subject. A title of an assignment for the BSW students is *'Development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system,'* and the students were expected to write an assignment not exceeding 1200 words. The students commented that there is no room for applying the country's reality on poverty-related issues in this assignment. The practical issues such as poverty among the war-affected communities and ex-combatants, unemployment among the war-affected youth, and poverty among the educated young women representing the war-torn areas cannot be discussed under this topic. Therefore, the subject should be taught with a socio-economic perspective intertwining the social work perspective into the course content.

The examination of lecture notes also signifies that the area covered by the lectures seemed to be more concentrated on economic aspects such as economic development strategies, changes in the Sri Lankan economy over the 65 years, growth and decline 1978-1993, economic performance 1994-2004, economic growth 2005-2013, goods and resources, scarcity of resources, opportunity cost, and economic problems (BSW Lecture Notes, 2018/2022).

5.1 Opportunities for Enhancing the Poverty Subject at the NISD

The following opportunities are made following the study findings and the suggestions provided by different stakeholders involved in this study. Given the variety in the specific socio-economic and political contexts in various countries and the requirements for professional social work qualification, the NISD should build a contextualized theoretical and conceptual framework for teaching poverty at various levels. It is perceived that adaptations of this framework will be of value for educators seeking to develop and strengthen the teaching of poverty within both BSW and MSW curricula (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, &

Monnickendam, 2009). The rejuvenating of the teaching and learning opportunities with external experts such as the Center for Poverty Analysis and Center for Policy Alternatives will benefit the social work programs. Organizing international or at least national level conferences on the theme of poverty and social work intervention would help them attract more resources and build a vibrant network in teaching and learning poverty subjects at the NISD.

The social work educators attached to the NISD appear to be aware of theoretical aspects and firsthand experience regarding poverty, which remains critically important in their teaching and learning practices. They also acknowledged that it is an inevitable component of their students' training. However, the study has suggested, the social work educators appear to find it challenging, in reality, to translate knowledge and practical experience into actions which would assist their students in handling with poverty-related issues and challenges. Lack of direct contact hours of the subject, lack of training for them, lack of willingness of the agencies where students are placed in will affect the students' ability to apply the knowledge and skills they learned into actions. The educators also found that making small hands-on changes in the teaching practices and field practicum may help their students improve the practices concerning both for agencies in which they are placed and develop more effective modes of participative practice with their clients (Mantle & Backwith, 2010). The educators stated that providing opportunities to their students to expose to their own social perception on the relationship between poverty and social work practice is vital to enhance the practice and internalize with theoretical aspects. The subjects taught to create awareness on poverty should help social workers to change their perceptions and behavior to help their clients who suffer from poverty rather than developing a professional rapport, which tends to increase their clients' feelings of vulnerability and unproductivity (Dowling, 2019).

6 Conclusion

This article on teaching poverty in social work is organized into six sessions. The first session focuses on an overview of the research subject, with an introduction to Social Work in Sri Lanka and the Role of the National Institute of Social Development. Secondly, it justifies the research providing a background to the study using a précis of previous studies on this subject. Subsequently, the study's objectives and the research questions are discussed, and finally present the significance of the study.

The second session consist of the method and approach adopted sampling selection criteria, and the sample size chosen to complete the study.

The third section discusses the rationale for incorporating poverty subject into social work teaching and learning activities and the existing course contents related to poverty. This session is constructed based on different poverty subjects, which are crucial to understanding the structure and purpose of the course structure.

Session four reports the analysis of the information gathered, and the identified main and sub-themes are presented based on the objectives of the chapter. The findings are categorized under the title 'teaching poverty courses in the BSW.'

The fifth session briefs about teaching poverty in the MSW Program, its challenges, and conducting in-course assessments and examinations. Finally, the 6th session is a short description of opportunities for enhancing poverty-related teaching and learning subjects and conclusion remarks.

This article investigated the practice of teaching and learning poverty subject in social work degree programs. The study revealed a lack of home and practical-driven approaches persists in teaching poverty at the NISD. The absence of a conceptual framework to teach poverty in the classroom and carrying out field activities is a grave challenge to be tackled immediately to make the subject more attractive and practical. The framework should be built based on a multidisciplinary approach and acknowledging the contribution made by the knowledge of people living in poverty (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss-Gal, & Monnickendam, 2009). This study did not focus on the strategies to be adopted in teaching activities, but it would be appropriate to consider this issue for future research purposes.

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