



# Utilization of Online Social Work Education for Community Empowerment

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**Abstract.** The implementation of Community-Based Education (CBE) for the benefit of the community is the recommended national policy in Indonesia. However, reviewed literature provides little guidance in curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation for social work education in a distance learning context. The goal of this research was to create a CBE framework for social work education that would allow students and teachers to engage in meaningful learning in a distant learning environment. Guided by the grounded theory approach, data were collected by interviewing ten social educationalists and the coding process was conducted through raising awareness of the principles of online learning and social work education. Validation of the results provided by three senior researchers from different universities. The findings revealed that self-directed and collaborative effort involving all stakeholders, selected community learning sites, Government support and engagement, as well as collaboration between academic institutions and communities, emerged as key criteria for the CBE program's success.

**Keywords:** community-based education · social work education · distance learning

## 1 Introduction

For more than a year, the world has continued to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and deal with significant disruptions in people's lives, including education. As GlubbSmith & Roberts [1] point out in their personal reflection on their time in New Zealand, the pandemic poses significant difficulties in social work training and the implementation of remote work social work programs with virtual platforms. This situation forces educators to provide educational services in a short amount of time, and assistance to pupils, which is often considered inappropriate. However, this situation also opens up opportunities for innovation and creativity to meet the needs of students and promote online social work education.

For many social work programs, technology has shown to be a viable alternative to classroom education. Social work educators were able to transition learning from the physical classroom to a virtual classroom with the use of online learning platforms, allowing students to connect with service users through technology. Many social work education and programs have benefited from technology advancements [2].

Social work as a mission has always featured a people-centered development philosophy that is proactive and preventative in its response to not only present but also future challenges [3]. The idea behind this people-centered development theory is that everyone should have access to products, services, opportunities, decision-making procedures, and information [4]. In this framework, there will always be a common educational component in social work, because education occurs when individuals in communities are given information in some manner.

Community-based education (CBE) is not a new concept in social work. In Indonesia, the implementation of CBE for the benefit of the community is the recommended national policy as stated in law number 20 of 2003 article 55. However, very few studies have been conducted investigating CBE for social worker education, especially in the context of online learning.

As a framework is needed to facilitate teaching and learning in online community-based social work education, for different stages of the undergraduate social work program, more precise suggestions on the characteristics of systematic learning are needed (macro, meso, and micro levels). This research intends to provide a more systematic CBE framework for undergraduate social work education in an online setting, in order to give students and faculty members with a meaningful learning experience that benefits both students and society.

## 2 Methods

An exploratory qualitative design with a grounded theory approach was used in this study. Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that use a series of methods to construct a theory based on evidence that has been methodically collected and analyzed. According to Carey [5], Grounded theory is most useful in areas where there has been little study and where fresh perspectives are needed to describe phenomena that are well-known but not fully understood. Because little research has been done in terms of investigating new concepts to understand the CBE phenomena, grounded theory seemed relevant in this study, either in Indonesia or globally. In this study, the study design, data collection, and analysis used a grounded theory approach by Corbin and Strauss [6].

The participants in this study were purposively selected based on their intensive studies of CBE programs. Five social work educationalists participated in the interviews. As coding is an important phase in grounded theory research, data were coded inductively by making “student-centered learning” principles more accessible [7], “experiential learning” [8], “online learning” [9], “curriculum” [10], and “interactivity” [11, 12], until saturation. Different data sources collected by interviewing five lecturers, who has spent the last five years actively coaching social work students in CBE settings, were used for triangulation. The interview guided by two questions about the essential characteristics of CBE that foster student’s comprehension of social work and tips for improving the CBE for social work students.

Analysing data involved six processes which were overlapping sometimes: transcribing; categorizing; coding; comparing; finding emergent themes; and interpreting. Recorded interviews were first transcribed and then categorized by two coders with different academic background (social work and education). The two coders classified the

transcripts separately and met for discussions on a regular basis to get a consensus on the categories. Connections between the categories found through carefully discussion in changing categories into specific terms. Dialectical process in coding paradigm were used to constantly compare the findings and the process was continues iteratively until saturated. In interpreting the findings, the meaning of the results was built by programmers and authors into emerging themes. Authors created a framework for community-based education for online social work education based on Van den Aker's levels of curriculum through this interpretation procedure [13].

Validation of the findings provided by three senior researchers from three different universities. The validators were asked about his/her agreement with the framework resulted from the interviews and their further recommendations.

### 3 Results

There has been identified a new structure for CBE online social work education. The essential characteristics of CBE that foster student's comprehension of social work include elements of micro, mezzo, and macro levels of curriculum. The micro level showed a range of topics under 3 main characteristics: (1) provides opportunities for students with their learning strategies to share experiences, resources and ideas, and engage in learning with community through self-regulated learning and cooperative and collaborative teamwork; (2) provides opportunities for real-time discussions with students as teachers' facilitating strategies through role model and tight feedback-revision loops; and (3) provides a more meaningful learning that engage students and teachers through social work content knowledge and socio-determinants of social welfare development as contents to be facilitated. Table 1 outlines these micro-level needs for CBE social work education in online setting.

Faculty prepare and follow a dynamic plan to make sure those micro components to be delivered gradually to social work students by considering the interactivity in a community practice and providing virtual supervision. The mezzo level needs are presented in Table 2 as guidance for faculty to organize CBE online social care workers.

Online social assistance Education may be perpetuated through cultivating shared interests through community-based activities. Therefore, commitment of the management and national curriculum towards graduate social workers in the macro levels will ensure the continuation of the CBE program. Table 3 outlines these macro-level needs for sustainable CBE online social work education.

The validators commented that the framework developed in this study is a simple but more systematic CBE for online social work education. The strength of this framework is its extensive levels of community involvement while learning with kids in order to address social problems that exist in the community. In their suggestions, they emphasized some important aspects of feedback, as a part of the micro-level, because the instructor cannot spend enough time with pupils in person to oversee them in real time Virtual supervision allows for a tighter feedback-revision cycle, as a part of mezzo level, permits instructors and students to spend less time and resources on a certain subject or skill, especially when internet communication is restricted or sluggish.

**Table 1.** Micro level

Categories	Emerging Themes	Quotations
Self-regulated learning	Students' learning strategies	"Learning in community-based social services allows students to capture and record many experiences. Students should be stimulated to reflect on their experiences, share the record and asynchronously discuss with their peers, and utilize them to make plans for their own future education."
Cooperative and collaborative teamwork		"As a way to maximize their own and other students' learning, During community investigations and discussion sessions, students will collaborate. Although students should acquire social work skills on their own, they will benefit from learning from other social workers in the process"
Role model	Teachers' facilitating strategies	"A role model is someone who is educated about social work practice, eager to share that information, and willing to allow students to witness him or her in action, as well as provide learning opportunities of the highest quality to students."
Tight feedback-revision loops		"When programs assign essays or projects, which is open-ended work, there is a platform in the learning management system that can easily take a short time after submission to receive feedback from peers, teachers, or communities. It helps overworked teachers."
Social work content knowledge	Contents to be facilitated	"Knowledge of organizations and services and their goals, practice knowledge and experience working with people, policy ideas and community priorities, research and theoretical ideas, and user and care knowledge and perspectives gained from experience are all considered important to inform and think about social work practice."
Socio-determinants of social welfare development		"The concepts of industrialization, urbanization, modernization, working-class mobilization, union strength, state and its special structure, as well as socio-cultural values in contemporary society, should be known by social work students. The difficulty is to engage individuals in learning while also attempting to solve societal problems."

**Table 2.** Mezzo level

Categories	Emerging Themes	Quotations
Interactivity in a community practice	Coordination and training gradually	“Through online learning, we can create a community of practice. The interaction within this community allows new students to become socialized into the organizational culture and values of the community.”
Virtual supervision		“Depending on their positions and responsibilities, the supervision needs of social work students and managers alter over time. Students become more autonomous as they gain experience and their connection with their supervisor deepens, and the management function may become more collaborative.”

**Table 3.** Macro level

Categories	Emerging Themes	Quotations
Commitment of the management	Sustainability	“The effectiveness of online social work education is dependent on management support. Given the dynamic change that school systems and communities are experiencing, management needs prioritized planning, organizing, actuating, monitoring, and good evaluation for online social work education.”
National curriculum towards graduate social workers		“Institutional commitment, curricular support and guidance, to train social workers with the information, attitude, and practice skills needed to support sustainability, variables such as interdisciplinary faculty development must be considered.”

## 4 Discussions

The two most common concerns voiced by participants in this study concerning community participation in online teaching and learning were that it would take a long time and that students would not be adequately equipped to complete a CBE program effectively because it would restrict the learning experience. As possible solutions, through instructors' role model and tight feedback-revision loop as enabling tactics, the micro-level of the curriculum presented in this study will give possibilities for students to improve their

self-regulated, cooperative, and collaborative learning. Confirming these findings, in an online course, well-implemented self-regulated learning practices have been shown to motivate students to aim for a positive collaboration experience, which leads to increased interest and engagement in online learning [14].

Students may benefit from an orientation with their community partner to social work content knowledge and socio-determinants of social welfare development in the community (content to be facilitated in the micro level). This aids students in developing a greater awareness of the synergies that exist between students and the community. For the greatest synergy between students and community in learning, it is critical to give students with community-suggested course content that expands their awareness of community concerns and related theoretical views [15].

Another major concern was that CBE initiatives with kids had little influence on students and the community. This is a big problem since having mutually beneficial community connections and students feeling competent in their work was another essential factor in the effectiveness of social work education. As a result, it's critical to define learning and community goals that students can achieve within the course's time span. Furthermore, it is critical to incorporate progressive growth as students proceed through their social work curriculum. Teachers who can organize a range of learning activities are needed in the mezzo-level of the curriculum, according to these findings [16]. Faculty assistance is important for students' learning experiences since it assists faculty members in developing face-to-face or online learning experiences [17]. In this study, to ensure students are progressing towards the CBE program, we propose the mezzo-curriculum involving students' gradual progress in social work education through ensuring interactivity in a community practice and providing virtual supervision.

As shown in the macro-curriculum in this study, management commitment and government backing are critical to the success of CBE initiatives. Partnerships between the community and educators not only provide several projects over time with a cumulative impact on both social work students and the community, but they also allow for the trust and mutual understanding that may assure future project design and success. Community needs may be addressed across many educators and courses throughout time if this sort of collaboration can be developed between the community and institutions or government [15]. The importance of multidisciplinary cooperation and networking in social work education cannot be overstated, as it gives a wealth of opportunities for examining solutions for increasing sustainability [18].

## 5 Conclusions

To summarize, we recommend that undergraduate social work education be taught online using a CBE framework developed in this study. By incorporating community people, professors, and government in this framework, we intend to provide more relevant learning for students while also meeting the flexibility demands of social work students and guaranteeing excellent student outcomes and participation.

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