



Determinants of Motivation for Field Placement among Vietnamese Social Work Students: A Risk and Protective Factors Analysis

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Abstract

Social work education in Vietnam is still developing, with field education emerging as a key area needing attention. Despite the central role of field placement in professional training, limited research has examined factors influencing students' motivation to engage in field education. This study investigates the risk and protective factors associated with social work students' motivation for field placement in Vietnam. A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted with 541 undergraduate social work students aged 18–28 from eleven universities nationwide. Guided by an ecological perspective, the study examined whether stress, assignment of unprofessional tasks, supervisor availability, and opportunities to apply classroom knowledge and skills were associated with students' motivation for field placement. The findings indicate that stress and the assignment of unprofessional tasks significantly reduced students' motivation, whereas opportunities to apply classroom learning in practice and supervisor availability significantly enhanced motivation. Supervisor availability emerged as the strongest positive predictor of motivation. These results suggest that students' motivation is shaped not only by individual experiences but also by the quality of their learning environment and supervisory support. The findings highlight the need to strengthen field education by improving supervision, reducing placement-related stressors, providing meaningful learning opportunities, and integrating theory and practice more effectively. Such efforts may enhance student engagement and contribute to the development of a competent social work workforce in Vietnam and similar emerging professional contexts.

Keywords: Social work, field placement, risk factors, protective factors, and motivation

Introduction

Field education, also called field placement, field practicum, or field instruction, is widely recognized as a cornerstone of social work education, playing a vital role in helping students develop the practical skills required for professional competence (Bogo, 2010; Wayne et al., 2010). Indeed, field education has been described as the “signature pedagogy” of social work because it provides the primary context through which students integrate theoretical knowledge, professional values, and practice skills in real-world settings (Shulman, 2005; Council on Social Work Education, 2022). Through direct engagement with clients, communities, and organizations, students develop professional identity, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and practice competence that cannot be fully achieved through classroom instruction alone (Bogo, 2015).

Research consistently highlights the importance of student motivation in navigating the complexities of field placement, suggesting that motivated students are more likely to persist through challenges and fully engage with the learning process (Alpaslan & Lombard, 2011; Osteen, 2011; Papadaki et al., 2012). According to Self-Determination Theory, motivation is enhanced when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness within their learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the context of social work field education, these psychological needs are often fulfilled through meaningful practice experiences, supportive supervision, and opportunities to exercise professional judgment. Research has demonstrated that highly motivated students are more likely to exhibit stronger learning

engagement, greater resilience, and higher satisfaction with their placements (Alpaslan & Lombard, 2011; Papadaki et al., 2012).

A growing body of literature also suggests that motivation in field education is shaped by both protective and risk factors operating at the individual, supervisory, and organizational levels (Fortune et al., 2001; Litvack et al., 2010). Ecological systems theory provides a useful framework for understanding these influences by emphasizing the interaction between students and their educational environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this framework, motivation during field placement is unlikely to result from a single factor; rather, it emerges through the dynamic interplay of supportive and challenging experiences within the educational environment. This perspective provides a useful framework for understanding how supervisory support, learning opportunities, stress, and workplace conditions collectively influence students' engagement in field education.

The most critical factor influencing students' motivation is the quality of the student-supervisor relationship (Bogo et al., 2010). Supportive supervision fosters emotional safety and trust, enhancing students' motivation and satisfaction with their placement experiences (Barlow & Hall, 2007; Collins et al., 2010). Research further suggests that effective supervision promotes professional identity formation, self-efficacy, and confidence in practice skills, all of which contribute to stronger educational engagement (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). Supervisor's availability is also especially significant. Supervisors' accessibility and willingness to engage with students about their tasks and progress support students' reflective learning and reinforce their sense of being guided and valued in the professional setting (Hopkins et al., 2005; Ahmed et al., 2021). Reflective supervision is particularly valuable because it encourages students to critically examine their practice experiences, connect theory to practice, and develop professional judgment (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Moreover, research has shown that working with qualified supervisors who help students meet their learning goals increases placement satisfaction (Cleak & Smith, 2012; Todd & Schwartz, 2009). Conversely, inadequate supervision, poor communication, or limited supervisor accessibility may hinder learning and contribute to student dissatisfaction and disengagement (Fortune et al., 2001).

In addition to supervisory support, students' opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings are essential for skill development and confidence-building (Cleak & Smith, 2012). Practice-based learning from supervision solidifies classroom instruction and increases students' educational investment, making this opportunity a key motivational factor (Cleak & Smith, 2012). This relationship is supported by experiential learning theory, which posits that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience and reflection (Kolb, 1984). Field placement provides students with opportunities to test classroom concepts in practice settings, thereby strengthening professional competence and confidence. Students who perceive a strong connection between classroom learning and field experiences report greater satisfaction and stronger commitment to their professional development (Fortune et al., 2001).

The nature of assigned tasks also influences students' motivation and learning experiences. Social work students generally expect field placements to provide opportunities for professional skill development, and exposure to organizational processes. However, some placements require students to perform duties that are perceived as unrelated to professional learning objectives (Maidment, 2003). Research indicates that when students spend substantial time on duties unrelated to professional learning objectives, they often report feelings of exploitation, diminished learning opportunities, and decreased motivation (Ayala et al., 2018; Maidment, 2003). Such experiences may weaken students' commitment to field learning and reduce their overall satisfaction with the placement.

Stress is another influential variable. Studies have found that students' stress often stems from organizational conflicts, performance anxiety, and the pressure of balancing placement with personal responsibilities (Maidment, 2003; Barlow & Hall, 2007; Maidment & Crisp, 2011; Collins et al., 2010). The transactional model of stress and coping suggests that individuals experience stress when they perceive environmental demands as exceeding their available coping resources (Folkman, 2013). In the context of field education, students are often required to manage multiple academic, professional, and personal responsibilities simultaneously, increasing their vulnerability to stress-related difficulties. High-stress levels have been linked to decreased motivation and learning difficulties, making them a notable risk factor for poor field placement outcomes (Hemy et al., 2016). Excessive stress has also been associated with burnout symptoms, emotional exhaustion, reduced self-confidence, and lower academic performance among students (Newcomb et al., 2017). However, some studies suggest that protective resources such as supportive supervision and resilience can buffer the negative effects of stress and facilitate successful adaptation to challenging placement environments (Grant et al., 2014).

Officially recognized as a profession in 2010 by Decision No. 32 of the Prime Minister, the social work profession in Vietnam continues to face numerous developmental challenges. Currently, there are 55 social work programs and 425 social service agencies nationwide, with a considerable proportion of

faculty members and field supervisors lacking formal qualifications in social work (Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, n.d.). As part of their professional preparation, social work students are required to complete 14 credit hours of field education within social service agencies, accounting for 12 percent of the total training time for the undergraduate program. Nevertheless, the field education component faces systemic issues, including inadequate supervision, insufficient placement opportunities, and weak collaboration between academic institutions and field agencies (Vietnam Social Work Network, 2016). These challenges are not unique to Vietnam but are also evident in other countries where the social work profession is emerging or undergoing structural transformation. Studies conducted in developing and transitional social work contexts have documented similar concerns regarding shortages of qualified supervisors, limited agency resources, inconsistent field education standards, and insufficient integration between academic and practice settings (Hugman et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2015). Such structural constraints may reduce the quality of students' learning experiences and negatively affect motivation to engage in field placement.

Despite the central importance of field education, empirical research examining Vietnamese social work students' experiences remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on broader issues of professional development and educational infrastructure, leaving a significant gap in understanding the factors that shape students' motivation to engage in field placement. Drawing on ecological systems theory and motivation research, the present study examines protective and risk factors influencing motivation for field placement among Vietnamese social work students. Specifically, this study examines whether supervisor availability, students' opportunities to apply knowledge and skills, stress, and the assignment of unprofessional tasks predict students' motivation to participate in field education. It is hypothesized that stress and unprofessional tasks will negatively influence motivation, whereas opportunities for practical application and supportive supervision will function as protective factors that enhance motivation, controlling for demographic and contextual variables.

Methodology

Sample, Design, and Procedure

This study employed a cross-sectional survey to examine factors associated with social work students' motivation to participate in field placement in Vietnam. Data were collected in 2021 from undergraduate social work students enrolled in eleven universities located across the northern, central, and southern regions of Vietnam. A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants due to the broad geographic distribution of social work programs and the accessibility constraints associated with data collection during the study period. The final sample consisted of 541 students between the ages of 18 and 28 years.

The survey instrument was developed as part of a broader project examining the current status of social work education and training in Vietnam. The questionnaire included items assessing students' demographic characteristics, perceptions of social work curricula, quality of university instruction, field education experiences, learning conditions, and professional orientation toward the social work profession. The present study focuses specifically on variables related to field education and students' motivation to engage in field placement.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the host university. Following IRB approval, the researcher collaborated with faculty members and program administrators at participating universities to distribute the survey to eligible students. To be included in the study, participants were required to (a) be currently enrolled in an undergraduate social work program at a Vietnamese university and (b) have access to the internet to complete the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided for participation.

Before beginning the survey, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the content of the questionnaire, confidentiality, and that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. Those who agreed to participate in the study were asked to answer the questions.

Data were collected through Google Forms, an online survey platform that enabled participants to complete the questionnaire remotely. The online format facilitated participation from students across multiple geographic regions while reducing administrative burden and data-entry errors. Completion of the survey required approximately 20 minutes. All responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifying information was obtained from participants.

Measures

Dependent variable.

Students' motivation. This variable examines if the participants have motivation to do field practicum by asking them "Do you want to do field placement?". This categorical variable was coded as 1= "No" and 2= "Yes".

Independent variables.

Supervisors' availability. This score variable examines the availability of the participants' field supervisor to discuss with them on assigned tasks at field placement by asking them "How often did your field supervisor discuss with you on assigned tasks at field placement?". The measurement of this item includes: 0="Never," 1="Rarely," 2="Sometimes," and 3="Regularly." The distribution of the measure of this variable ranges from 0 to 3, with higher scores endorsing that field supervisors are more available to discuss with the participants on their assigned tasks.

Students' opportunity. This score variable examines the participants' opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained from classroom into practice at field placement by asking them "How often did you have the opportunity to apply your knowledge and skills gained from classroom into practice at field placement?". The measurement of this item includes: 0="Never," 1="Rarely," 2="Sometimes," and 3="Regularly." The distribution of the measure of this variable ranges from 0 to 3, with higher scores endorsing that the participants have more opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained from classroom in to practice at field placement.

Covariates

Students' stress. This score variable examines the participants' stress at field placement by asking them "How often did you feel stressed with things such as conflicts, assigned tasks, and learning experience at field placement?". The measurement of this item includes: 0="Never," 1="Rarely," 2="Sometimes," and 3="Regularly." The distribution of the measure of this variable ranges from 0 to 3, with higher scores endorsing the participants' higher level of stress at field placement.

Unprofessional tasks. This score variable examines if the participants are required to do unprofessional tasks at field placement by asking them "How often were you required to do unprofessional tasks such as taking out trash and cleaning at field placement?". The measurement of this item includes: 0="Never," 1="Rarely," 2="Sometimes," and 3="Regularly." The distribution of the measure of this variable ranges from 0 to 3, with higher scores endorsing that the participants are required to do more unprofessional tasks at field placement.

Age. This continuous variable represents participants' age ranging from 18 to 28.

Sex. This categorical variable was coded as 1= "Female" and 2= "Male".

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics (Tables 1 and 2) show that the percentage of those who did not have the motivation to do field placement was lower than that of those who wanted to practice in the field. Specifically, the majority of participants expressed a willingness to engage in field placement, suggesting that social work students generally have positive attitudes toward experiential learning and professional practice. The majority of participants were female, consistent with the gender composition commonly reported in social work education programs in Vietnam and internationally. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years old. The higher the scores, the more field supervisors were available to discuss with the participants on assigned tasks; the higher the scores, the more opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained from the classroom into practice the participants had; the higher the scores, the more stress at field placement the participants experienced; and the higher the scores, the more unprofessional tasks at field placement the participants were required to do.

Chi-square and independent-samples t-test results indicated that all predictors, except age, significantly predicted the dependent variable, students' motivation, in bivariate analyses. These findings suggest that students' field placement experiences may play a more important role in shaping motivation than age differences within the sample. In particular, both risk factors (stress and unprofessional tasks) and protective factors (supervisor availability and opportunities to apply knowledge and skills) demonstrated significant associations with students' motivation prior to the multivariate analysis. The multicollinearity assumption was tested and met, as all VIF values were less than 10. Therefore, concerns regarding excessive overlap among the independent variables were minimized, indicating that each predictor contributed unique information to the regression model.

To examine the relationship between the predictors and students' motivation to undertake field placement among the participants, a binary logistic regression was conducted, with students' motivation

as the outcome variable. Demographic information, including age and sex, was entered into the first block, followed by students' stress and unprofessional task variables (risk factors) in the second block. Finally, the independent variables, supervisors' availability and students' opportunity (protective factors), were added to the third block to determine whether these factors affected students' motivation after controlling influences from risk factors and demographic variables. This hierarchical modeling approach allowed for an assessment of the incremental contribution of protective factors beyond demographic characteristics and placement-related risks.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Students' motivation and Sex Variables (N= 541)

Variables	n	%
Students' motivation		
No	100	18.5
Yes	441	81.5
Sex		
Male	166	30.7
Female	375	69.3

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Age, Supervisors' availability, Students' opportunity, Students' stress, and Unprofessional tasks Variables (N= 541)

Variables	M (SD)	Min/Max	Potential Scores
Age	20.95 (1.952)	18.00 – 28.00	18.00 – 28.00
Supervisors' availability	2.25 (.882)	0.00 – 3.00	0.00 – 3.00
Students' opportunity	2.40 (.810)	0.00 – 3.00	0.00 – 3.00
Students' stress	1.65 (.918)	0.00 – 3.00	0.00 – 3.00
Unprofessional tasks	1.90 (1.023)	0.00 – 3.00	0.00 – 3.00

Table 3 shows the results of a binary logistic regression analysis examining the relationships between all predictors and students' motivation (No/Yes). The data indicated that the overall model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 541) = 87.990, p < .001$, and 86.1% of cases were correctly categorized. The significant chi-square indicates that the set of predictors collectively distinguished between students who were motivated to participate in field placement and those who were not. Furthermore, the relatively high classification rate suggests that the model demonstrated good predictive accuracy.

Results for demographic variables showed that $\chi^2(2, N = 541) = 8.034, p < .05$, indicated no statistically significant difference between older and younger participants ($OR = .973, 95\% CI = .849–1.115$). This finding suggests that age was not a significant determinant of motivation for field placement in this sample. Male participants were more likely to want to do field placement than their female counterparts ($OR = 1.687, 95\% CI = 1.006–2.828$). This odds ratio indicates that, after controlling for all other variables in the model, the odds of reporting motivation for field placement were approximately 69% higher among male students than among female students. In other words, being male was associated with a greater likelihood of expressing interest in field placement participation.

Findings of the risk factors block, $\chi^2(4, N = 541) = 32.142, p < .001$, indicated that those who had stress were 1.6 times ($OR = .624, 95\% CI = .469–.829$) less likely to want to engage in field placement than those who did not. This result indicates that increased stress significantly reduced students' motivation, highlighting the potentially detrimental effects of challenging placement experiences on students' willingness to participate in field education. Those who were required to perform unprofessional tasks were 1.8 times ($OR = .563, 95\% CI = .422–.750$) less likely to want to complete a field placement. Among the risk factors examined, assignment of unprofessional tasks emerged as one

of the strongest negative predictors of motivation, suggesting that experiences perceived as unrelated to professional learning may undermine students' enthusiasm for field education.

Finally, results of the protective factor variables, supervisors' availability and students' opportunity, $\chi^2(6, N = 541) = 87.990, p < .001$, indicated that the more opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained from the classroom into practice, the more likely the participants wanted to do field placement (OR = 1.609, 95% CI = 1.124–2.302). This odds ratio indicates that students who were provided with meaningful opportunities to apply classroom learning in real-world settings demonstrated significantly greater motivation to engage in field education. The more likely supervisors were available for discussion about assigned tasks, the more likely participants were to want to do a field placement (OR = 1.921, 95% CI = 1.325–2.784). This result indicates that supervisor availability emerged as the strongest positive predictor in the final model. Students who reported greater access to supervisory support had nearly twice the odds of expressing motivation for field placement compared with students who experienced lower levels of supervisory engagement.

These findings support the study's hypotheses that stress and unprofessional tasks function as risk factors that reduce motivation, whereas supervisor availability and opportunities to apply knowledge and skills serve as protective factors that enhance motivation. The results further suggest that supportive learning environments and meaningful educational experiences may be particularly important for sustaining students' engagement in field education.

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Examining Students' motivation by All Predictors (N= 541).

Variables	B (SE)	Wald (χ^2)	OR (95% CI)
Block 1			
Age	-.027 (.070)	.153	.973 (.849-1.115)
Sex (1)	.523 (.264)	3.929*	1.687 (1.006-2.828)
Block 2			
Students' stress	-.472 (.145)	10.534***	.624 (.469-.829)
Unprofessional tasks	-.575 (.146)	15.387***	.563 (.422-.750)
Block 3			
Students' opportunity	.476 (.183)	6.770**	1.609 (1.124-2.302)
Supervisors' availability	.653 (.189)	11.874***	1.921 (1.325-2.784)

Note:

For Model: $R^2 = .151$ (Cox & Snell), $R^2 = .244$ (Nagelkerke), $\chi^2(6) = 87.990, p < .001$

Block 1: $R^2 = .015$ (Cox & Snell), $R^2 = .024$ (Nagelkerke), $\chi^2(2) = 8.034, p < .05$

Block 2: $R^2 = .058$ (Cox & Snell), $R^2 = .094$ (Nagelkerke), $\chi^2(4) = 32.142, p < .001$

Block 3: $R^2 = .151$ (Cox & Snell), $R^2 = .244$ (Nagelkerke), $\chi^2(6) = 87.990, p < .001$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier research highlighting how placement-related stress, stemming from role ambiguity, performance anxiety, and personal responsibilities, undermines students' emotional well-being and reduces their effectiveness in field settings (Barlow & Hall, 2007; Bogo et al., 2010; Gelman, 2011). The negative association between stress and motivation observed in this study suggests that students who experience excessive psychological and emotional demands during field placement may become less willing to engage in practice-based learning. This finding aligns with the stress and coping model (Folkman, 2013), which posits that individuals are less likely to remain engaged in challenging activities when perceived demands exceed available coping resources. In the context of field education, unmanaged stress may not only hinder learning but also weaken students' commitment to professional development.

Additionally, this study contributes new evidence to extant literature by demonstrating that assigning unprofessional or irrelevant tasks disengages students and actively discourages them from committing to their field education. This confirms and extends prior findings by Maidment (2003), who noted similar concerns about the misalignment between assigned tasks and educational objectives. The findings suggest that students view field placement as an opportunity to develop professional competencies and apply classroom learning. When placements fail to provide meaningful educational

experiences and instead require students to perform tasks unrelated to social work practice, students may perceive a disconnection between the goals of field education and their actual experiences. Such perceptions may reduce both motivation and satisfaction with field placement.

The results of this study also highlight the motivational value of providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills during field placement. Participants who engaged in meaningful, practice-based learning reported higher motivation levels, aligning with Cleak and Smith's (2012) findings that experiential application enhances learning outcomes and professional confidence. This finding reinforces the central role of experiential learning in social work education. Opportunities to translate classroom knowledge into real-world practice may strengthen students' sense of competence and professional identity, thereby increasing their motivation to participate in field activities. The ability to observe the relevance of academic content in practice settings may also help students perceive field education as a valuable component of their professional preparation rather than merely a program requirement.

This study confirms that students who experience responsive and engaging supervision are more motivated to participate in field placement. This aligns with the work of Bogo et al. (2010) and Todd and Schwartz (2009), who emphasized that supervision quality, including emotional support and constructive feedback, directly influences students' satisfaction, motivation, and goal achievement in field placement settings. Notably, supervisor availability emerged as the strongest protective factor in the final regression model. This finding highlights the critical role of field supervisors not only as educators but also as mentors, facilitating learning, providing emotional support, and helping students navigate challenges encountered during field placement. Accessible supervision may enhance students' confidence, reduce uncertainty, and create a supportive learning environment that fosters motivation and professional growth.

Collectively, the findings of this study support an ecological understanding of student motivation in field education. Rather than being determined solely by individual characteristics, motivation appears to be shaped by interactions between students and their learning environments. Risk factors such as stress and assignment of unprofessional tasks may undermine motivation by creating barriers to meaningful learning, whereas protective factors such as supervisory support and opportunities for knowledge application may enhance motivation by strengthening students' sense of competence, belonging, and professional development. This pattern suggests that educational institutions and field agencies play a crucial role in creating conditions that either facilitate or hinder students' engagement in field education.

Importantly, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the Vietnamese social work education context, characterized by systemic challenges, including a shortage of qualified supervisors and inconsistent collaboration between academic institutions and field agencies (Vietnam Social Work Network, 2016). Unlike previous studies in more established social work systems, this study uniquely examines how protective and risk factors operate in a developing professional landscape. Doing so contributes original insights to the global discourse on field education, with implications for strengthening field placement practices in emerging contexts. The findings suggest that although the Vietnamese social work profession faces structural and institutional challenges, the factors that promote or hinder student motivation are broadly consistent with those identified in international research. This observation supports the applicability of existing field education theories across diverse professional contexts while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of adapting field education practices to local realities.

The findings also have several practical implications for social work education programs and field agencies in Vietnam. First, universities should strengthen partnerships with field agencies to ensure students receive meaningful learning opportunities aligned with educational objectives. Second, investments in supervisor training may be particularly beneficial given the strong association between supervisor availability and student motivation identified in this study. Training initiatives should emphasize not only technical supervision skills but also strategies for mentoring, communication, and student support. Third, mechanisms should be developed to monitor students' placement experiences and identify situations in which students are assigned excessive unprofessional tasks or experience elevated levels of stress. Early intervention in such situations may improve both learning outcomes and motivation.

Similar to other studies, this study has limitations. The use of a convenience sample of social work students in Vietnam restricts the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to social work students in other cultural, institutional, or educational contexts. Because of its cross-sectional design, this study could not account for changes in motivation that may occur over time among participants. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and integrate qualitative methods to capture the nuanced experiences underlying students' motivation in field education.

Longitudinal studies would allow researchers to examine how motivation evolves across different stages of field placement, while qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which supervision, stress, learning opportunities, and organizational conditions influence students' experiences. Additionally, comparative studies across countries or educational systems may help identify contextual factors that shape motivation and field education outcomes in emerging social work professions.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study aims to examine the risk and protective factors influencing social work students' motivation to engage in field placement in the Vietnamese context. Consistent with the study hypotheses, the findings confirm that risk factors, including stress and the assignment of unprofessional tasks, significantly reduced students' motivation to participate in field placement. Conversely, protective factors, such as supervisors' availability and students' opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in practice, significantly enhanced students' motivation. The findings of this study show that students' motivation in field placement is influenced by both individual attributes and the quality of the learning environment. More specifically, the binary logistic regression results demonstrated that stress and unprofessional tasks were significant negative predictors of motivation, while supervisor availability and opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in practice were significant positive predictors. Among the protective factors, supervisor availability emerged as the strongest predictor of students' motivation, highlighting the central role of supervision in supporting learning and professional development during field placement. These findings provide empirical support for the argument that field education outcomes are shaped not only by students' personal characteristics but also by the quality of supervisory relationships and the educational environment in which learning occurs.

The findings are consistent with quantitative evidence from social work education research in the Asia-Pacific region, which has emphasized the importance of supportive learning environments, effective supervision, and manageable learning demands for student engagement and educational success. For example, a survey of 296 social work students in the Philippines identified multiple educational and environmental challenges that affected students' learning experiences, demonstrating the importance of institutional and learning-context factors in shaping educational outcomes (Uclaray et al., 2023). Similarly, recent scholarships in the ASEAN region has highlighted the critical role of field education and supervision in preparing a competent social work workforce capable of responding to increasingly complex social issues (Rose, 2024). These regional findings reinforce the conclusion that strengthening the quality of field education environments is essential for promoting student motivation and professional readiness.

By identifying both risk and protective factors, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of field education in developing professional contexts in Vietnam. The study further contributes to the growing international literature by providing empirical evidence from an emerging social work profession in which field education systems continue to evolve. Importantly, the findings support an ecological understanding of student motivation, demonstrating that motivation is not solely an individual characteristic but is shaped by interactions between students and their field education environments. Supportive supervision and meaningful learning opportunities appear to strengthen students' sense of competence, professional identity, and engagement, whereas stress and inappropriate task assignments may weaken students' commitment to field learning.

The results also underscore that improving the quality of field education is not merely an educational concern but a workforce development priority. Students who experience supportive, professionally relevant, and educationally meaningful placements are more likely to remain engaged in their professional preparation and enter the workforce with stronger confidence and practice readiness. In this regard, investments in field education may have long-term benefits for the quality, sustainability, and professionalization of social work services in Vietnam.

The findings suggest that efforts to reduce student stress, minimize the assignment of unprofessional tasks, improve supervisor accessibility, and create meaningful opportunities for knowledge application may enhance students' motivation to participate in field placement. Consequently, universities, field agencies, and policymakers should work collaboratively to strengthen field education infrastructure, improve supervisory capacity, and ensure that placement experiences align with professional learning objectives.

Overall, this study highlights that motivation for field placement is fostered when students are provided with supportive supervision, authentic learning opportunities, and placement experiences that reflect the values and competencies of professional social work practice. Strengthening these

conditions will be essential for developing a competent, resilient, and committed social work workforce capable of addressing Vietnam's evolving social challenges.

Suggestions

Field education is a cornerstone of professional social work training, crucial for cultivating students' practice competencies and professional identity. This study's findings have important implications for social work policy development and practice in Vietnam and other countries where the profession is still emerging. They address critical areas for systemic and policy-driven reform to ensure field placements effectively support student learning and motivation (Chu et al., 2009; Lyons & Lawrence, 2006).

A key implication is the need for stronger partnerships between social work education providers and field agencies. Government ministries, universities, and professional associations should collaborate to develop national guidelines defining field education's roles, expectations, and learning outcomes. Such frameworks should mandate structured placements that integrate academic content with real-world practice, ensuring students have meaningful opportunities to apply theory in a supervised setting (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010).

The quality and accessibility of field supervision remain critical challenges. In contexts where supervisors often lack formal training in social work, such as Vietnam, national policies must prioritize investment in supervisor capacity-building. Universities and agencies should jointly develop training programs, certification standards, and incentives for supervisors (Bogo, 2015). Policies should also require regular, structured supervision meetings to facilitate reflective learning and ongoing feedback. Adequate supervision has increased student motivation, reduced stress, and improved learning outcomes (Bogo et al., 2010; Todd & Schwartz, 2009).

The assignment of unprofessional or irrelevant tasks undermines the integrity of field education. National agencies and institutions should introduce enforceable guidelines that ensure tasks assigned during placements align with core social work functions and learning objectives (Barretti, 2007). Field agencies must be held accountable for maintaining professional and educational standards, with monitoring mechanisms to prevent misuse of student labor.

Stress and anxiety are significant barriers to effective learning in the field. Supervisors must be trained in technical oversight and in recognizing and responding to students' emotional needs (Fortune et al., 2001). Institutions should also consider implementing student feedback systems and field placement evaluations as tools for continuous improvement (Knight, 2001).

In addition, universities should establish systematic mechanisms for monitoring placement quality throughout the practicum period rather than relying solely on end-of-placement evaluations. Regular check-ins with students, supervisors, and field agencies can help identify concerns related to excessive stress, inadequate supervision, or inappropriate task assignments before they negatively affect students' learning experiences and motivation.

Given the strong positive influence of opportunities to apply classroom knowledge and skills, social work programs should work closely with field agencies to design learning activities that progressively develop students' competencies. Placement plans should include clearly defined learning objectives, opportunities for direct practice, and structured reflective activities that facilitate integration of theory and practice. Such measures may strengthen students' professional identity formation and enhance the educational value of field placement.

At the policy level, national social work development strategies should explicitly recognize field education as a critical component of workforce preparation. Policymakers should consider establishing minimum standards for field instruction, supervisor qualifications, student learning experience, and agency participation in practicum programs. Developing a national quality assurance framework for field education could help improve consistency across institutions and agencies while strengthening accountability for educational outcomes.

Finally, the long-term development of social work as a profession in Vietnam and similar countries depends on embedding field education within a broader policy agenda for social services. This includes support for field sites, dedicated funding for supervision, and recognition of field instructors as essential contributors to professional training (Maidment & Beddoe, 2012).

Future research should continue to evaluate the effectiveness of supervision training, field education reforms, and placement quality improvement initiatives. Evidence generated by such studies can inform policy development and contribute to establishing a more evidence-based, student-centered, and professionally relevant field education system. These systemic supports will raise the quality and consistency of field education, ultimately contributing to a more competent and motivated social workforce.

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Author/Authors Brief Bio

Dr. Nguyen is presently an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Southern Indiana (USI). He holds a Ph.D. degree in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh and a master's degree in social work from Boston College. Dr. Nguyen has many years of experience working with international non-profit organizations and in-need populations in Vietnam and the United States. He also has many years of teaching experience at various universities in Vietnam. His research areas of interest include religion and human behaviors, youth addiction, school violence, mental health problems, and international social work.

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