Indigenization of Social Work Education and Practice in Pakistan

Anjum Noreen
anjumnoreen46@gmail.com
PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Prof. Dr. Asif Naveed Ranjha
Asif.Naveed@iub.edu.pk
Professor Department of Social Work, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
Corresponding Author: * **Anjum Noreen** anjumnoreen46@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Social work as a profession emerged during the late 19th century as an aftereffect of industrialization, poverty, and injustice, progressing with professionalization in the formal training and standardized techniques. Following the country's achievement of independence in 1947, Pakistan underwent social work growth as a major state and international organization response to ailing issues including poverty, health, and the settlement of refugees. In order to prepare professional social workers, social work education started in the University of Karachi and the University of Punjab during the 1950s and was further expanded to include child welfare, disaster management, and community development in subsequent years. The focus of qualitative research at present is on challenge and potentiality in indigenizing social work education and practice in Pakistan. Information were obtained through interviews with 24 scholars and practitioners who were specifically selected from the government social welfare department and the public institutions. The thematic coding disclosed predominant strengths of curriculum weaknesses such as obsolete learning materials and failing to infuse fieldwork leading to a divorce between professional preparation and workplace demand. Institutional shortcomings like weak faculty drives and negligible research inhibit development of education. The study recommends curriculum change under the umbrella of experiential learning, practicum in action, and additional professional training so that social work education can address the evolving national and global needs of the profession.

Keywords: *Indigenization, Social Work Education, Professional Practice, Curriculum Development, Field Work Integration*

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a trans-disciplinary profession with the aim of promoting human well-being at individual, family, and community levels by pleading social issues and pleading social justice (CRUDU, 2023). World history of the profession keeps evolving, but its adaptation to the cultural reality of different places, including Pakistan, involves working with the local socio-cultural reality (Yunong & Xiong, 2008). Indigenization of social work education is necessary to meet the specific needs of Pakistani society by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, traditions, values, and ways of knowledge (Oliphant et al., 2019). The above study depicts the importance of social work education in Pakistan, the impact of Westernization, and the issue of incorporating indigenous methodologies. The study responds to these challenges by formulating a robust and culturally sensitive social work practice model, which can support sustainable social change and professional growth in Pakistan (Riaz, 2016). In response to the inability of Western social work theories and practices to fit the unique social, cultural, and economic realities of the non-Western world, indigenization of social work was proposed.

Indigenization of social work is a move away from Western paradigm imitation towards supporting culturally suited and context-specific social work practice, advocated by Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988). Importing countries try to fit Western models into dealing with particular issues, values, and cultural contexts (Yunong & Xiong, 2008). Indigenization of social work is a global movement towards decolonizing the profession and mainstreaming indigenous knowledge systems into social work education and practice. Midgley (1981) condemned the imposition of Western values of individualism and capitalism on the newly independent countries as evidence of professional imperialism. Indigenization requires the use of local knowledge, local tradition, and community-based problem-solving, which are core to successful social work interventions (Grey & Coates, 2010). In an attempt to incorporate indigenous tradition and beliefs in social work education in Nigeria and India, an effort has been made to situate interventions as context-specific and culture-sensitive. (Ugiagbe, 2014).

Since the nation is multicultural, religious, and societal in character, indigenization is extremely crucial in Pakistan. Pakistan has always been guided by Western paradigms in social work education, which are not sufficient in responding to the needs of Pakistani society, including poverty, gender injustices, and human rights abuses (Rehmatullah, 2002). Social work intervention effectiveness has been compromised due to theory-knowledge-practice gaps caused by the lack of locally produced material in social work curricula (Nikku, 2010). Indigenization of social work in Pakistan has developed significantly but is quickly gaining strength soon. Siddiqui and other writers have promoted the need for building social work practice on the values and culture of the host nation, and not on Western-imported methodologies (Rozas, 2023). This is achieved through incorporating culturally responsive methods, community-based approaches, and indigenous epistemologies into social work practice and education. The indigenous community can tackle social problems using the adoption of indigenous social support systems such as baradari (family systems) (Hill, 2008). Lack of indigenous theoretical frameworks and the scarcity of literature that addresses social work among indigenous populations hinder contextualized practice (Ugiagbe, 2015).

The insular nature of scholarship and research work in indigenization also serves to support dependency on Western models. To the accomplishment of these goals, great levels of curriculum change need to be instituted, the relationship between scholarship and indigenous peoples needs to be increased, and the focus on documenting and disseminating indigenous ways and stories needs to be increased (Riaz & Granich, 2022). Indigenization of social work is a worldwide movement to indigenize the profession so that it would be culturally responsive and functional. Meeting the specific social needs of Pakistan is an important activity with the potential for long-term social change. Incorporation of indigenous knowledge and cultural factors into social work practice and education will support the development of a more contextualized and effective model of social work in Pakistan. Globalization as indigenization has made a major contribution to social work by changing service delivery, reshaping the professional labour process of social workers, adding new issues like human trafficking and environmental issues, and triggering demands for indigenization or building locality-based theory and practice. It also examines the role played by the state in the process and what it implies for 21st-century social work. (Dominelli, 2010).

Research Objectives

1. To explore the means of mainstreaming indigenous knowledge, traditions, and case studies of social work education in Pakistan with the inclusion of suitable international practices
2. To identify the problems and possibilities involved in the integration of social work training with practice actual practice of social work in Pakiatan

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social work education was introduced in the 19th century, with the United Kingdom and the United States of America leading in its development. United Kingdom's Charity Organization Society (COS) and Settlement House Movement provided the cornerstone for professional social work, focusing on poverty alleviation and community organization (Walker & Brown, 1936). The origins of professional education in America date to 1898 and to Mary Richmond, who was a leading figure in the founding of the first school of social work (King, 2011). The professionalization of social work in India from simple philanthropy to a professionalized vocation was sharply marked with the founding of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in 1936 (Simon, 2021). Social work education came out of job training and turned into formal scholarly pursuits. Casework and psychoanalytic theory were stressed in early training programs, followed by group work, community organization, and social justice (Tyler, 1951). Social work education started to develop in Pakistan during the 1950s and remained heavily impacted by Western ideologies.

The curriculum changed with time to reflect local needs, integrating aspects of rural development, family welfare, and Islamic thinking (Shah, 2018). University-level social work training has since 1954 been aimed at developing effective social workers with education and training to assist the public and commercial sectors in planning and implementing social welfare programs. The 1990s involved intense efforts toward indigenization and more concentration toward gender studies, human rights, and social work. (Shah, 2020).

Global Indigenization Movements/Patterns

Indigenization came into being as a response to the failure of Western paradigms of social work in responding to the unique needs of post-colonial countries. India, Pakistan, and South Africa have begun integrating indigenous practice and local knowledge into curricula in schools of social work to advance culturally sensitive social work education. This was achieved to support their capacity to deal with domestic social issues, such as caste discrimination and marginalization of the tribal people (Midgley, 2016). Indigenization ensures that practice in social work has its foundation in the indigenous economic, social, and cultural setting. It improves individuality, deals with problems that are specific to culture, and advocates for marginalized voices (Grey & Coates, 2010). The indigenization of indigenous knowledge in social work education makes it more realistic and adaptive to grassroot issues, like poverty and gender inequalities. Indigenization is necessary in the Pakistani context, especially because of its distinct socio-political and socio-cultural setting. Western approaches are not typically suitable for solving localized child labor, honor violence, and rural poverty (Shah, 2018). The integration of local voices into the social work curriculum enables the development of context-specific interventions that have the ability to empower target groups classified as religious minorities and rural community members. The 21st century has seen a huge push towards indigenization, where education curricula have increasingly been dominated by indigenous knowledge, along with changing world issues like climate change and migration. Indigenization is a result of incorporating indigenous knowledge, local values, and practices into the social work education system. Drivers of the phenomenon include local community participation, organizational frameworks established by national education schemes, and globalization implications (Grey & Coates, 2010).

This essay responds to the criticisms offered by Grey (2010) and Grey and Coates (2010) of A Reflection on Indigenization Discourse in Social Work (Huang and Zhang, 2008), and contributes more debate on the subject of indigenization within social work.

Social workers must implement various strategies in order to understand local contexts and put research and practices into effect that are appropriate for the community. We are extending our discourse to include some of the Chinese perspective on indigenization details. Cultural emphasis issues in indigenization are also discussed. Indigenization is described as being capable of impacting the profession of social work negatively (Yunong & Xiong, 2011). The study proved the contribution of Bangladeshis to world social work in the area of women. Discussion pertains to women empowerment activities against the backdrop of international debates regarding indigenization, universalization, and imperialism. The article undertakes an in-depth critique of existing social work literature, scans the history of the profession, and explores the websites of various Bangladesh development agencies to ascertain the strategic positioning. The research indicates that Bangladesh is experiencing an indigenization phase in the paradox of indigenization–internationalization, with top-down (act locally, think globally) and bottom-up (act locally, go global) strategies in international social work and women's development (Parveen & Choudhury, 2023). The incorporation of language, religious factors, and field placements has a very significant positive effect on the cultural responsiveness of social work education (Caron & Ou Jin Lee, 2019). Universities, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and faith-based communities play a leadership role in indigenizing social work education. They promote incorporating traditional knowledge, local healing, and community-based interventions within education (Di Rosa & Reich, 2022). Coordination among agencies is central to the shaping of culturally relevant and effective interventions in social work (Nimmagadda & Balgopal, 2000).

Challenges in Pakistan

The primary problems are the predominance of curriculum grounded in Western perspectives, a lack of local research initiatives, inadequate institutional support, and substantial resistance to transformative change (Hussain et al., 2023). Language difficulties, cultural diversity, and the impacts of globalization present obstacles to the integration of culturally responsive social work interventions in Pakistan (Di Rosa & Reich, 2022). Social work education is guided by several theoretical frameworks, including Systems Theory, Ecological Theory, and Critical Social Work Theories. This enhances social workers' understanding of human behavior, social structures, and interpersonal dynamics (Teater, 2023). They must address issues such as poverty, gender inequity, and mental illness through culturally appropriate methodologies. Western theories such as Psychodynamic Theory and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy may collide with collectivist norms in Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2023). Theories must be contextualized for use in Pakistan (Graham, Al-Krenawi, & Zaidi, 2007). This paper offers a succinct summary of social work education in Pakistan, including contemporary challenges and possible remedies. Critical issues identified include the suitability of social work education and practice for Pakistani society, pedagogy, supervision and field education, as well as the certification and licensing of social workers. Several pertinent issues warrant discussion concerning the establishment of successful and dynamic social work education (Shah, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research uses qualitative design with purposive sampling and focused interviews to collect opinions from opinion leaders regarding the evolution of social work education and practice in Pakistan. Research questions were developed to assess gaps in public knowledge regarding social work practice and education in Pakistan. Research design refers to a scientific blueprint for guiding data collection and interpretation in responding to research concerns effectively, as Adeoye (2024) and as originally defined by Kelleher (1986). The case study design is useful for looking at the event in-depth in its natural environment, emphasizing complex interdependent processes between the several components (Calva González, 1999). A sample of 25 respondents, including social work practitioners and educators, was

chosen to grasp the development of social work practice and education in Pakistan. The interview guide was carefully crafted by the researcher to gather qualitative data such that the contribution was framed in accordance with the study aims. The study sample includes stakeholders of social work education in Pakistan, such as professors, practitioners, and graduates. Research participants were government university scholars with a social work and social welfare officers with a background in education in social work. The inclusion criterion was that they must be Master's, M.Phil., or Ph.D. holders of social work, thus having great theoretical and practical knowledge about the field.

The questions given below have been developed for understanding the evolution of social work education and practice in Pakistan:

1. What are the most important challenges and opportunities in closing the gap between theoretical education and practice implementation in social work education and practice in Pakistan?
2. How is social work education in Pakistan to be indigenized to more accurately reflect local cultural, social, and economic realities without compromising global best practices?

The rising interests are intended to place into the spotlight the prospects and challenges facing education in social work in Pakistan with the intention of improving curriculum and practice towards culture and context responsiveness. Participants of the study consisted of two groups that were either identified from academia at 13 numbers or from state social welfare divisions at 12 numbers. Participants were chosen purposefully with regard to willingness to participate in the study, experience level, and prior experience. The method used ensured participants with a long history of local concern and knowledge, thus ensuring the validity and applicability of the study (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The researcher uses pre-specified criteria in participant selection, including willingness to participate, appropriate experience, knowledge, and ability (Rai & Thapa, 2019). Data were collected through an interview guide with open-ended questions to obtain lengthy responses from participants.

The interview schedule was split into two separate halves: the first requested general demographic data, and the second included 19 questions pertaining to the study objectives. Pre-testing of the interview schedule and incorporation of field experts' comments rendered the tool valid and reliable (Haynes et al., 1995). Face-to-face interviews were used to collect the primary data. The researcher had conducted qualitative analysis employing NVivo 12 software through thematic analysis for identifying response patterns and themes (Kawulich, 2015). This enabled intensive understanding of participant views toward enhancing social work education in Pakistan. Ethical issues regarding respondent voluntariness and anonymity were examined in the study. Volunteers provided oral consent before data collection to ascertain that the answers were solely for academic use. The ethical study involved identifying all sources used throughout the study and maintaining transparency and neutrality in the research process (Butler, 2002).

The study notes a number of limitations, like geographic and contextual limitations, that can restrict the generalizability of the findings. The qualitative methodology employed in the study, characterized by a small sample size, may restrict the identification of general trends in Pakistan. Use of second data based on Western-centric presumptions will further limit the scope of analysis (Price & Murnan, 2004). In spite of such limitations, the study enlightens the history of social work practice and education in Pakistan.

RESULTS

A critical analysis of indigenization of social work education in Pakistan from the perspective of practitioners as well as academicians. The institutions awarding degrees in social work have been growing very rapidly, primarily in cities. The rural population has been far behind in terms of receiving courses in social work. There have been remarkable findings in existing research that during the last ten

years, there has been a phenomenal 50% rise in the number of universities teaching social work courses and this reflects growing acknowledgment of the profession (Academicians, n=12). Practitioners are concerned with the quality and the level of the courses and believe that not all universities are equal in intellectual rigor (Practitioners, n=12). The biggest issue that has been discovered is the issue of practice and theory in the field. Researchers observe that students are provided with poor practicum, which renders them less effective in addressing actual problems (Researchers, n=8).

Experts agree with this concern, noting that practice placements in the practice are too short or do not accurately depict actual social work settings (Experts, n=8). The course depends heavily on Western models and theories, which lack any background within the socio-cultural setting of Pakistan. Western paradigms are noted to be premised on the assumption of institutions and resources that do not even exist in Pakistan (Scholars, n=8). Experts cite a call for further localized materials, e.g., indigenous practice and case studies in the Pakistani context of society (Experts, n=10). Social work intervention is only possible with acute cultural sensitivity. Researchers emphasize that culturally sensitive social workers can gain the trust and rapport of the local community, particularly rural and marginalized communities (Researchers, n=8). Practitioners require an identification of local values and customs to make interventions effective and meaningful (Practitioners, n=10). There are currently no effective government policies in place to enable social work education development. Researchers observe that policies are ad-hoc and do not reflect the actual situation on the ground (Researchers, n=10). Practitioners have noted that social work programs are typically given money that is intended to be for project-based and short-term funding, thus making them unsustainable in the long run (Practitioners, n=12).

The collaboration of practitioners, policymakers, and schools of education plays a significant role in applying indigenous views within social work curricula. Scholars (Scholars, n=12) call for curriculum reform and research on local concerns. Practitioners highlight experiential and community-based training and their direct engagement in curriculum development (Practitioners, n=10

The deeply rooted resistance of the practitioners and institutions, because of their customary connection with Western models, is one of the biggest challenges faced in inducting indigenous methods. Scholars claim that practitioners are resistant to applying local models primarily because of inadequate training in addition to the lack of empirical evidence in support of their effectiveness (Scholars, n=6). Practice holders embrace their dependency on Western frameworks but assert that they would want to apply the provided frameworks under local conditions, provided that they are well trained (Practice holders, n=9). Global best practices mixed with local information is called for by experts as well as academics. Academics assert that the Western models ought to be carefully analyzed and designed in accordance with local requirements (Scholars, n=12). Researchers stress the importance of employing global strategies combined with local knowledge to create culturally appropriate interventions (Experts, n=10). The study of social work education and practice in Pakistan, i.e., from theory to practice, Western-dominated paradigms, and localization of curricula. The study is an overview of the views of researchers and practitioners, highlighting the areas of convergence and divergence in their opinions.

Both scholars and practitioners support the development of social work programs in Pakistan as indicated by rising enrollment and institutional development.

Notwithstanding this, the quality of education, especially the theory-practice gap, is still an issue. Fieldwork is set to be a major factor in bridging the gap; however, institutions are not uniform in the quality of fieldwork offered. There exists a general agreement on both sides on the necessity to alter curricula by including practical training in the form of case studies and community projects to adequately prepare the students for tackling the practicality of real problems. Western paradigms of Pakistani social

work education are dominated, which is a serious concern of note. Scholars condemn the colonial legacy of such paradigms and advocate indigenous theory and curriculum development in education. Practitioners, however, are concerned with the constraints entailed in the application of Western theories within local contexts, particularly rural and marginalized ones. Both advocate extensive contextual understanding of social work education to resist the particular socio-cultural forces of Pakistan.

It is commonly argued that social work education needs to embrace indigenization by infusing local knowledge, traditions, and case studies relevant in the region. Scholars call for revolutionary structural and institutional changes, while practitioners underscore the practical value of such reforms, especially the sense of better equipping the students for actual uses. Financial constraints and organizational resistance to change have been cited as the principal barriers to indigenization. The two sides are urging more collaboration among policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in curricula design sensitive to neighborhood culture.

The principal obstacles to social work education indigenization are budgetary constraints and institutional resistance. Educators stress the necessity of locally financed research and developing the progress of curriculum, yet practitioners highlight the practical difficulties of pursuing such change. They both affirm that mobilization of local cultural values in social work practice and the facilitation of a hybrid solution incorporating global best practice and local knowledge are needed. The study also depicts the need for greater interaction between practitioners and academics to close the gap between practice and theory. While research and curriculum design are highlighted by the researchers, experiential, practice-based training is highlighted by the practitioners. The commonality in the two lists is a sign of the imperative need for greater policy intervention on the part of policymakers to enable social work education and practice indigenization in Pakistan. The authors stress on the problematic state of school and intermediate-level social work education is not mentioned in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This research puts into context the imperative requirements of social work practice and education in Pakistan since they need a locally rooted and culturally responsive model. Practitioners and researchers view the imperative of social work education and the bridging role of fieldwork as a connecting concept between theoretical and practical application. Nevertheless, though, there is an annoying problem with the prevailing Western paradigm, since it cannot capture the cultural-social contexts of Pakistan. While betterments have been available in raising education provision, problems remain with regard to the quality of education as well as the employability of graduates within the workplace.

There are disagreements between theorists and practitioners—scholars have faith in theoretical upgrading and structural reform, whereas practitioners have faith in pragmatically oriented short-term training to acquire skills to address immediate needs. There is general agreement on including local case studies, knowledge, and values in the syllabus to make the education effective and relevant. The key hindrances to implement such a change are scarce funds and institutional resistance. Researchers call to highlight the need to identify local resources for research and curriculum, practitioners call to highlight a lack of systematic licensure system of professional social workers as a significant shortcoming. Transformatory social work education change requires collective action by educators, policymakers, and practitioners. The research highlights the need for cultural competency as a basis for more empathetic and competent practice. NGOs also assume the central implementing and advocacy role albeit most typically vilified on aspects of finances and sustainability. Outcomes justify providing a template for mixed mode education where local as well as foreign best practice comes together under locally adapted procedures that demand curriculum decolonization, improve on field placements, and promote interpectoral partnership. It will

enhance social work education in Pakistan's ability to produce more capable professionals to meet the complex and diverse needs of the populations they serve, bringing it closer to more capable and context-sensitive practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Curriculum reform to include local case studies, local culture, and conceptually sound culturally appropriate theories.
- Hybrid Models to include best practices globally as well as local indigenous knowledge.
- Cultural competency training should be a mandatory part of social work education anywhere and everywhere.
- Involvement of NGOs and inputs from society in building culturally adapted content.
- Institutional Local Research to provide evidence-based local practice a model.
- Institutional, practitioner, and policymaker collaborative platforms for localizing curriculum development.
- Strengthened Fieldwork Programs through systematic, contextual, and prolonged placements.
- Minimize the Practice-Theory Gap through experiential learning and practitioner-oriented instruction modules.
- Standardize Program Quality across institutions through national regulation and accreditation.
- Overcome financial constraint through use of local funding mechanisms and implementation of a long-term commitment to projects.
- Offer Licensing and Certification to professional social workers to ensure quality practice.
- Facilitate Institutional Reform to cut down on resistance and allow the adoption of indigenised practice.
- Enhance Interagency Collaborations to link education to the real service delivery systems.

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