

## Journal of Peace, Development and Communication



Volume 05, Issue 1, January-March 2021  
 pISSN: 2663-7898, eISSN: 2663-7901  
 Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-20>  
 Homepage: <https://pdfpk.net/pdf/>  
 Email: [se.jpdc@pdfpk.net](mailto:se.jpdc@pdfpk.net)

<b>Article:</b>	<b>Tackling the odds in Development of Sociology Discipline: A Case Study of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies University of the Punjab, Lahore</b>
<b>Author(s):</b>	Dr. Iram Rubab Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Management and Technology Lahore.
	Waqar Haider Awan C.E.O, Complete Human Resource Solutions, Islamabad
<b>Published:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Publisher Information:</b>	Journal of Peace, Development and Communication (JPDC)
<b>To Cite this Article:</b>	Rubab, Iram & Waqar Haider Awan. (2021). "Tackling the odds in Development of Sociology Discipline: A Case Study of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies University of the Punjab, Lahore" <i>Journal of Peace, Development and Communication</i> , vol. Volume 5, no. Issue 1, 2021, pp. 228-239, <a href="https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-20">https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V05-I01-20</a>
<b>Author(s) Note:</b>	Dr. Iram Rubab is serving as Assistant Professor at Department of Sociology, University of Management and Technology Lahore.
	Waqar Haider Awan is C.E.O of Complete Human Resource Solutions, Islamabad

### **Abstract**

Sociology's demand as a discipline has multiplied because of the unexplored social structures in Pakistan. The present article attempts to explore the challenges faced by the Department of Sociology at University of the Punjab, a pioneer department in the field, in the six decades since its establishment. It further analyses the ways in which these challenges were resolved. Pure qualitative approach of holistic case study is employed; in-depth faculty interviews and policy reviews were used. The findings reveal that classification of sociology as a soft science has led to a lack of governmental funding, availability of trained faculty and a reluctance of students to opt for the discipline because of market trends. Another issue which comes to the front is a serious dearth of indigenous literature. Improvement measures taken by the department include establishment of faculty development programs, incentives to engage the faculty in scholarly endeavors, development of libraries and computer labs, promotion of a research culture through a policy of compulsory thesis for degree completion. Collaborations with foreign universities have been extremely fruitful e.g. student cultural exchange program with the University of Bielefeld, Germany and, University of Leeds in the UK. Similarly, there is a faculty development program with Arizona State University in the USA. More importantly, the department has been able to resist governmental pressure to merge with other social science departments. The role of the department has been monumental; however, it can be further improved if the department starts its own research journal to enhance its sociological research capacities.

**Keywords:** sociology, University of the Punjab, social sciences in Pakistan, teaching research

**Introduction:**

Sociology's demand as a discipline has multiplied in recent years in face of Pakistan's unexplored social structures and its burgeoning development aid industry. The diverse and complex nature of chronic and emerging social problems of Pakistan needs to be handled with deep sociological insight, as these problems are causing serious hurdles in achieving required development levels (Hafeez, 2005). However, Sociology being a social science and comparatively newly established discipline faces serious challenges for its development in Pakistan. The present article attempts to explore the challenges Department of Sociology in Punjab University — a pioneer department — encountered in the six decades since its establishment. Additionally, it analyses the ways in which these challenges were resolved, and also brings into light areas which require further improvement.

Auguste Comte coined the term 'Sociology' in 1838, following which, he started propagating for the formation of a separate academic discipline which studied human behavior (Gane, 2006). By 1904, sociology was being taught in two continents at three different universities, but it was not until the 1950s that the idea of establishing a sociology department was taken into account in Pakistan. Initially, it was taught as an elective course at Forman Christian College (1942), Lahore and later at other social science departments at University of the Punjab in 1950. The approval for a separate department for sociology was not granted until 1953, but due to massive support from the academic sector the Department of Sociology was established at the University of the Punjab, Lahore in 1955. Launching a social science department in Pakistan was in itself an arduous task owing to the predominant social perception that only the study of pure sciences, mathematics and commerce is valuable; while social sciences (more commonly regarded as soft sciences) and humanities are for incompetent students. Apart from social opposition, the department had to face numerous issues, which included financial constraints due educational budget cuts, lack of local scholarship in sociology, etc. In spite of these hurdles the university was further able to expand the department into an institute i.e. Institute of Social and Cultural Sciences (ISCS) in 2006, which comprised five other social science departments.

The current research is a case study of the Department of Sociology and not the institute as a whole. It takes a detailed account of the challenges faced by the department in its establishment phase. It also analyses its successes by taking into account the annual research output (by both faculty and students), student faculty ratio, enrollment and graduation rates, library and IT facilities, and other services provided to the students like counseling, clubs, etc. Moreover, the administration's response to the obstacles mentioned in the aforementioned paragraphs has also been given consideration. This study aims at presenting the case of the Department of Sociology at University of the Punjab as an example for the newly established social science institutes in Pakistan; it not only seeks to inspire them, but also sheds light on areas which the department itself needs to work upon. Both these aspects are very significant in improving the situation of social science teaching and learning in Pakistan.

**Research Methodology**

The current research is qualitative in nature and follows the ontological stance of interpretive school of thought and the epistemological stance of social constructionist (Aguinaldo, 2004; Charmaz, 2008; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008; Ormston et al., 2014). Holistic case study method (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Swanborn, 2010) was used to study the department of sociology at Punjab University. Triangulation of sources of data (Patton, 1999) was done through analyzing the policy documents of the department, in-depth interviews of five key informants with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide and study of the history of the department with regards to the impact of governmental policies on the department's governance. Thematic analysis technique was used. The findings of the study were assorted

into the themes in accordance to different phases of the history of the department (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Clarke et al., 2015; Vaismoradi, et.al, 2016). These include establishment of the department, hurdles it faced after initiation, new challenges facing it and how it's a source of inspiration for other sociology institutes across the country. The gatekeepers of this study were the administrators of this department, whom the researchers negotiated with to gain access to the required documents and information (Kara and Pickering, 2017; Khan, 2014; Orb et al., 2001). Although the investigation was not of a sensitive nature, participant consent along with data security was given immense importance. The factual information and statistics used in this study were obtained after analysis of the data collected. The researcher ensured all ethical considerations to conduct this research study.

### **Discussion on the Basis of Study Findings**

The study was aimed to investigate the challenges encountered by the department of sociology during its establishment phase; it further analyzed the successes of the department on basis of various indicators like the annual research output (by both faculty and students), student faculty ratio, enrollment and graduation rates, library and IT facilities, and other services provided to the students like counseling, clubs, etc. The data was collected through the key informants' in-depth interviews, policy documents of the department and the impact of the governmental policies on the growth of the department. The following five themes emerged in the result of the thematic analysis of the data collected.

#### **Establishment of the Department**

In 1937, the idea to introduce sociology as a subject in the University of the Punjab's curricula was officially presented for the first time by the Punjab Social Sciences Conference, Lahore. The idea was hailed by the university officials and it was discussed by various standing committees and academic council's meetings. In 1942, Dr. E.D. Lucas, the then Vice-Principal of Forman Christian College, Lahore initiated the instruction of Sociology initiated at bachelor's level and soon after the Department of Sociology at Punjab University was set up with the assistance of Dr. John B. Edlefsen of Washington State University, Pullman, who had come to the Punjab University under the Inter College Exchange Program. General MA classes began at the Department of Sociology in September 1955 with 35 students, 26 males and nine females (Institute of Social and Cultural Sciences [ISCS], 2006).

#### **Challenges Faced During the Earlier Years**

During the early stages of its development, the department came across the various new challenges. The major challenges were (1) lack of trained teachers and governmental support (2) little interest of students due to stereotyping of sociology being a subject for incompetent students (3) lack of local literature and indigenous sociological research (4) Influence of American sociology on sociology syllabi in Pakistan.

Absence of trained faculty was a crucial impediment in development of sociology discipline during the earlier years. As shown in the figure below, there were only nine sociology teachers spread across three departments in 1967. This meant that the department of sociology at University of the Punjab often had to rely on visiting faculty and even had to hire permanent faculty members who had a degree in any social science field instead of sociology. This meant that the student faculty ratio was also very high, which significantly affected the quality of the graduates being produced and also overburdened the teachers. It further limited the scope of the department's development as it did not have the infrastructure to support and enroll new students beyond a certain limit. The dearth of PhD faculty members in the discipline had a great impact on the scholarly study of this subject and the department could only produce four PhDs until 2001.

**Table 1: The Number of Sociology Departments with the Qualifications of Teachers and their Degrees (foreign or local) in Years, 1963, 1987 and 2001 in Public Universities of Pakistan**

Year	Departments (Count)	Teachers (Count)	PhD (Foreign)	PhD (Local)	MPhil (Local)	MPhil (Location not known)	MA/ MSc (Foreign)	MA/ MSc (Local)	MA/MSc (Location not known)	Foreign degrees other than MA/PhD MPhil	Degrees not known
1963	3	9	3	-	-	-	1	3	2	-	-
1987	6	44	3	2	1	-	6	29	3	-	-
2001	8	53	7	4	4	1	2	28	7	-	-

Source: Council of Social Sciences (COSS) unpublished, data.

\*The figure includes one teacher whose location of doing PhD was not known.

After its initiation, the department developed on foreign grants and help from foreign academicians e.g. from University of Washington, but not only were these insufficient, they also declined in the coming years and soon the gaps due to lack of governmental support began to show. Political instability in the country meant that there was no consistent policy regarding higher education and the budgets often fluctuated in accordance to the priorities of those in power. In addition to this, little effort was made in changing the way people viewed social sciences, especially the study of society, which resulted in a lack of public support for the discipline as well. Moreover, inevitable political events were not as favorable either. The Bangladesh War meant that the University of the Punjab could no longer benefit from the sociology academics at University of Dhaka, where a sociology department had been established recently after the one at University of the Punjab. Along with these limited opportunities for regional discourse came in President Zia's Islamization in the following decade. It considerably undermined the scope of social sciences due to labels, such as studying social philosophy is un-Islamic, it follows a western agenda, etc. Such policies disillusioned many and some senior academics were so disgruntled that they even left the country.

Lack of local sociological research along with indigenous literary content which could complement the scientific study of society posed another problem to the newly established department. There were no locally available text books for this discipline and foreign texts often fell short with regards to cultural issues of Pakistan, which meant that a locally contextualized understanding of the discipline was difficult to achieve in students. In addition to this, the teaching of sociology had been greatly influenced by American sociology in earlier years. Though it meant that the works of some great sociologists had been taught, the theoretical incompatibility of these texts in case of Pakistan has remained a problem and affected the way students sought knowledge and solutions to their own country's social issues. As pointed out by many senior sociology academicians literary works of Bano Qudsia, Ashfaq Ahmad, etc. have been often used as reference books for sociology, which is quite problematic as despite their insights the books do not take into account empirical evidence and a research oriented approach when dealing with social issues. Though the situation has

significantly improved with the passage of time, availability of indigenous sociological literature is still one of the issues currently confronting the department.

### **Strategies Adopted to Overcome the Challenges**

In the initial phase of Sociology Department's development challenges were numerous as mentioned above, but due to some exceptional policies and hard work the department was able to overcome these challenges to a great extent. In particular, the efforts of Dr. Muhammad Anwar to improve teaching quality in spite of a jarringly high student to faculty ratio are immense. Once that was dealt with, Dr. Hafeez got space to improve the Department's research culture during his tenure. Similarly, Dr. Zakir Zakaria and Dr. Rubina Zakir (the Department's first woman Chairperson) have contributed significantly to the department's recent success – their efforts came at a time when the institute was itself financially flourishing due to support by university management. This change from department to institute and its consequent academic implications have been discussed in detail in the section on take-off period. The department now bolsters a highly qualified permanent faculty, individual library resources, offers a wide array of degrees in different majors, and is leading the way in hosting research talks and seminars. However, most efforts towards improvement are not just about plain and simple hard work. At many instances, the management has to cave in to the pressure of university management and broader governmental interests. Then, it does needlessly embroil senior faculty in political conflicts. The solution to this is not a cessation of participation in politics, rather it requires a reimagining of political engagement where it is not so fraught with petty governmental interests – something that has been seen in recent course of action – and is more geared towards student and faculty organizing – something that has been shunned to date –, notwithstanding the fact that on occasions not much can be done in face of tyrannical bureaucratic control. If the latter is adopted, it would be a strategic step towards improvement.

### **Take-off Time**

Despite numerous challenges, a landmark achievement for the department occurred on December 5, 2006, when at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Department's new building, it was upgraded to the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies. The Institute comprises six following departments:

1. Department of Sociology
2. Department of Public Health
3. Department of Population Sciences
4. Department of Criminology & Security Studies
5. Department of Development Studies
6. Department of Gender Studies

All these departments are offering the following degree programs:

1. PhD (Sociology and Gender Studies) (Regular and Replica)
2. PhD Public Health (Evening)
3. M.S./MPhil in Sociology and Gender Studies (Regular and Self-Supporting)
4. M.S./MPhil in Education Policy & Development (Regular and Self-Supporting)
5. M.S/MPhil Public Health (Evening)
6. M.Sc. Sociology (Regular and Self-Supporting)
7. M.Sc. Development Studies (Regular and Self-Supporting)
8. M.Sc. Gender Studies (Regular and Self-Supporting)
9. M.Sc. Criminology & Security Studies
10. M.Sc. in Population Sciences

### 11. B.S (Honors) in Sociology & Socio-cultural Studies, and Gender studies (Regular and Replica)

In addition to this, the Department of Sociology has signed MOUs with various foreign universities. Under its MOU with Arizona State University, a faculty exchange program is organized annually. Similarly, with Bellfield University, Germany it collaborates for student exchange programs. Such exchange programs are also available with some universities in UAE as well. Moreover, regular online seminars for students with faculty members and students at various well reputed universities are also organized.

The department has also significantly improved in terms of infrastructure. The newly renovated building now houses a library, which has a collection exceeding 15000 books and most of which are also available in digital form for the students. Furthermore, the upgraded classrooms are equipped with multimedia and WiFi facilities, and there is free access to computer labs in order to encourage students pursuing research. All of this has enabled the department to produce eleven PhD graduates over the course of the last five years along with its students and faculty members undertaking twenty-eight research projects. The graduation and enrollment rates for Master and MPhil degree programs have been equally encouraging.

#### **New challenges**

The socio-economic and political circumstances of Pakistan are not very conducive for the development of higher education in the country, especially when it comes to social sciences. The role of the government has often remained disparaging in this regard. In 2000, the Musharraf government proposed to merge the social work and sociology departments in order to reduce expenditures. Though the proposal faced substantial resistance specifically from faculty members and was consequently dropped, it demonstrated the lack of governmental support for sociology and other such disciplines, and also reignited the traditional debate that social science majors offered meager prospects in contrast to their counterparts. Reiteration of ideas such as pure science education is more significant in building a nation further damaging the repute of this degree program. It was reflected in the repleting number of research contributions in the following years (Zaidi, 2002). Another blow came in the shape of closing down of the university social science research center for a while in 2003. Though the department recovered, the damage was lasting. Most importantly, the threat of budget cuts is still a palpable one and the uncertainty in this case is a major hurdle in the development of the department. Though the department was further expanded into the Institute of Social and Cultural Sciences in 2006 with full-fledged renovation of its building, many budget cuts followed. In recent years increasing terrorism in Pakistan has proved detrimental for research activities in universities as heavy expenditure of security measures are often met on the cost of research activities in face of budgetary constraints.

Another major challenge facing the Sociology Department is the lack of availability of indigenous literature for this academic discipline. Although some local publishers have published sociology books for undergraduate and graduate levels, these books are of largely poor quality due to very low expert involvement. Similarly, some of the books are simply a translation of foreign sociological texts, which significantly affects their relevance as these lack local contextualization and only contain basic social demographics regarding Pakistan at most (Gardezi, 2003). This has given a lot of room for people to question the capabilities of the graduates this institute has produced over six decades despite the fact that as a whole scholarly contribution by Pakistan in any academic field has not been very significant. Moreover, lack of indigenous literature also greatly influences the way sociology is taught as it deprives students from the opportunity of developing in-depth sociological understanding of their own country, which has significantly affected the discourse over Pakistan's social problems and its solutions. Due to lack of dissemination of scholarly indigenous literature and its inclusion in textbooks and course outlines e.g. the work of the Hamza Alavi and other

influential Pakistani sociologists, students remain significantly unaware of the sociological contributions of their fellow countrymen and consequently, face numerous issues in theoretical contextualization and formation of cultural appropriate research tools (Shah et al., 2005). There even have been instances of students simply replicating Western study designs due lack of guidance from supervisors which led to issues of result replication; in a widely cited example, it is what the students did not realize in one of the cases was that the findings they were aiming to replicate had been originally proved in American urban middle-class families (Gardezi, 2003). These issues can only be resolved by valuing the contributions of Pakistani sociologists as it will not only provide students with a well rooted theoretical understanding of the subject but it will also encourage future sociologists to do more as they will realize that their work is not simply there for viewership by other academicians and is rather being taught.

To further encourage the research culture, the department's administration needs to look into the common practice of group theses at Master and BS. Honors level. During the data collection phase, the researchers came across several instances where the students had submitted group theses for the completion of their degrees, which often results in lack of expertise when it comes research skills as most of the students remain unaware of the complete processes involved in planning and executing a study; equal distribution of workload amongst students is also a significant issue in this regard. As pointed out by other academicians, students' lack of understanding about methodological intricacies and other such areas often hampers their progress if they opt for higher education or research oriented jobs. It also means that research contributions made by these students e.g. research articles would often remain insignificant due to the aforementioned demerits. It is vital that the department discourages such practices in the future. Moreover, as identified by Hashmi (2001), the nature and output of Pakistan's sociological research has been significantly determined by the interest of the funding agencies, which was reflected by the falling numbers of research production following the Islamization by Zia and consequent reduction in foreign aid e.g. USAID for social sciences in the 1980s. Such dependence is detrimental for the research culture of any nation and thus the department should further encourage the trend of independent researches. These even rank higher in terms of validity and reliability due the absence of vested corporate interests (Saigol, 2016).

Competency of students who enroll at the department significantly determines the capabilities of the graduates it produces. It is often seen that people in Pakistan enroll in social science departments once they have exhausted all their opportunities of gaining admission in medical, engineering programs, etc. This means that most of the aspirants of social science degrees often have low grades in their past educational experience and also lack the motivation to change them in the future. This lack of hard work is a major impediment in producing skilled sociologists. In light of this, a major challenge facing all social science and humanities departments is of providing a counter narrative to the predominant belief that a social science degree is for incompetent students and its job prospects are limited to the academia and development sector.

Availability of specialized faculty is another area of concern, the department which runs both regular and replica programs for BS, Master, MPhil and PhD has only nineteen permanent faculty members. Though it compensates for it by hiring highly qualified visiting faculty members, the student teacher ratios are unacceptably high; it stands at 1:89 with permanent faculty and 1:38 if visiting faculty is also counted. Moreover, the teachers are also not provided with assistants. Not only does it mean that most of the teachers are overworked and cannot pay keen attention to theses and research projects, it also results in a limited outside the classroom interaction between the students and the teachers, something that is vital for a healthy educational experience. It also further limits the opportunities available for



student counseling; the department offers no such services formally. Though the students can access such facilities free of cost at the Department of Clinical Psychology, it is not very helpful as the psychology department has to cater to each and every student enrolled in the university. The department also does not offer career counseling services. Both of these significantly affect a student's experience of university education and their job prospects, thus the department should aim at providing at least some of these services in accordance to its capacity.

In addition to this, the declining numbers of foreign qualified instructors is another area of concern. As highlighted by the figure below, there has been a drop in the availability of foreign qualified PhDs in Sociology all over Pakistan.

*Share (%) of Foreign Trained PhD Out of Total PhD Teachers  
in the Discipline of Sociology*

Year	Foreign Qualified PhD	PhD from UK	PhD from USA	PhD from other Countries
1963	67	0	100	0
1987	50	0	50	50
2001	29	50	0	50
2013	26	33	–	67

*Source: 1963 Handbook, 1987 Handbook, 2001 Handbook, HEC official website of universities.*

Despite this, the Department of Sociology at University of the Punjab has retained and over the period of time improved the number of foreign qualified faculty members.

### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

To overcome the identified issues a lot needs to be done. This study recommends both policy changes at governmental level and administrative changes the department needs to incorporate. When it comes to the role of the government, it itself needs to illustrate that the country's social policies are contingent upon the study of its people; the first step towards which is resuming the collection of important social statistics like population census. To further reduce the stigma surrounding sociology degrees, the government should encourage people opting for these programs by offering scholarships and lucrative financial aid programs. Moreover, strong media campaigns, which show that studying social sciences and humanities equally contributes towards the building of a nation, should also be encouraged. It is imperative that people are assured that investigating social structures like family does not pose a threat to our societal arrangement and is rather aimed at ensuring its proper functioning. In addition to this, the government should work towards making people realize that a sociology degree is very beneficial professionally, and is a prerequisite for numerous governmental jobs in social welfare, planning and development, etc. (Hafeez, 2001).

### **Recommendations for Department Officials**

To improve the standard of sociological education being imparted in the country, a lot of responsibility falls to the Department of Sociology at University of the Punjab, as it is a pioneer institution in this regard. The worth of any social science department is significantly reliant on its research output for which the research culture needs to be further encouraged. A significant step towards it is initiating the institute's own research journal, which is not only disseminated amongst the student body, but students are also engaged during the course of its compilation. In addition to this, group theses at Masters and BS level should be discouraged so that individual students can develop a better understanding of research skills and enhance their capacities. Moreover, it should be ensured that students with a strong aptitude in research are admitted for scholarly degrees, which can be done by only awarding marks on the merit list for papers published in HEC recognized journals. For Masters and BS degree

programs, extra marks given on merit for hafiz-e-Quran, National Cadet Course (NCC) have nothing to do with sociological understanding of an individual -- thus academicians should lobby for elimination of such policies.

Availability of faculty is another issue which has to be catered to. It is high time that the department of sociology produces graduates who are not only capable, but are also willing to thoroughly investigate their country's social issues and generate local literature, if it wants to continue with its legacy. At the same time, it should also value the contributions made by its researchers by including their findings in academic textbooks for undergraduate level and below to engage the up and coming sociologists.

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