



Student Performance at Tertiary Level: The Role of Social Work Education

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Abstract: *This paper has been designed to examine the role of satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional in student performance at the tertiary level in the Punjab province. Social work has become an essential component of higher education globally, especially with the rise of globalization and internationalization. The study has been based on a quantitative approach. It uses the data from a sample of 347 social work discipline students from public sector universities through a proportionate random sampling technique. It is important to mention that the students have been enrolled in the BS (4 Years) program. A cross-sectional survey was conducted, and a structured questionnaire was administered to collect information from social work students. It was pretested from 30 randomly selected students, and reliability was confirmed. It used three independent, two paths, one dependent, and one intervening variable. In the same way, the study found that satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional indirectly affect social work student performance through the mediation of practice learning and supervision of academic activity.*

Key Words: Social Work Education, Spiritual Orientation, Commitment to Be Professional, Practice Learning, Student Performance

Introduction

Social work has become an essential component of higher education globally, especially with globalization and internationalization (Amin et al., 2019). Social Work Education is an academic training and working experience at Social Welfare Agencies (Camilleri, 2005). Social Work Education promotes human relationships and promotes social change. Its purpose is to prepare students for professional social work practice. Social work education in the syllabus has integrated activities (Shoaib et al., 2023). Social work education includes theoretical knowledge and field-based education combined with practice. The focus of social work discipline is on learning skills and becoming competent in the field (Eltaiba & Ndoye, 2018). Global social problems give importance to the international perspective of social work education (Lalayants et al., 2014). Since the beginning of social work education, fieldwork practice has been considered a core element of social work discipline. One's professional self can be studied through fieldwork education, which also develops a critical methodology for theoretical knowledge and practice and attempts social work training roles (Savaya et al., 2003). In support of this, it was stated that field work of social work is a central part of social work education (Fortune et al., 2005). Social work fieldwork experience is important in the social work curriculum, which enhances the professional and technical skills of the students. Hence, this study has been outlined to examine the role of satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional on student performance at the tertiary level in the Punjab province.

Statement of the Problem

Social work education programs are expanding throughout the country, but there is a need to develop a universal curriculum that may cover local as well as international perspectives. There is a lack of instruments for measuring the performance of the student in social work education and fieldwork practice. Social work field education must be assessed, which enables the currently ongoing processes of observing and monitoring and further feedback. Student's competency in the fieldwork practice can also be assessed.

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Assessment has multifarious purposes, which include the promotion and enhancement of student learning, monitoring and development of student work, safeguarding competence, curriculum and training, policy formulation, granting qualifications, and pinpointing further educational needs and practical requirements.

Another problem regarding the incorporation of social theories with fieldwork is the attitude of the students of social work before entering into practical learning (Redmond et al., 2008). Social work students have a range of attitudes toward different areas of social work, which influence the student's motivation toward both academic and field education. The attitudes are related to the performance of the students in social work fieldwork. Students are prepared to get experience directly through skills and agency settings (Fortune et al., 2005).

Field Work practice is enhanced through the integration of theory into practice. It is possible only if the students, teachers, and internal/external supervisors work with coordination and achieve the goals and expectations. The majority of external supervisors do not have knowledge about professional social work and social work curricula. Moreover, students of social work education must be imparted sustained experience by external supervisors related to social work education. Training of agency-based supervisors regarding theoretical knowledge should be a part of the curriculum as it is a major gap that has been identified (Deal & Clements, 2006).

Significance of the Study

All professions have a central target as the alignment of theoretical knowledge with practice. However, the researcher has observed that Sony students of social work discipline at the universities of Punjab, Pakistan, are unable to understand the elementary principles of the plication of theoretical knowledge. Social work education always believes in the notion that the professional practice of social work rests on the use of theoretical knowledge.

Besides, the researcher has also observed that the students of the social work discipline have different attitudes towards fieldwork training. The researcher has also noticed that expectations of the internal supervisors related to practical work are fulfilled differently by the social work students. Subsequently, the current examination of fieldwork practice has reviewed the performance of the students, and the researcher is motivated to examine the professional skills of the students and assess the theoretical knowledge of supervisors. This is the fact that clarity regarding the theoretical model or framework is needed when students are placed and contacted by external supervisors.

Review of Literature

Social work education is being provided in 145 countries globally (Bhatt, 2021). The study findings show that each country in the world has its own social work discipline as a distinct system and structure (Laidlaw et al., 2020). Similarly, the primary data assert that it is a professional discipline that includes classroom knowledge and fieldwork practice (Dhemba, 2012). Comparably, the study found that formal and informal learning are the main types of social work education. Both learning types integrate classroom and fieldwork practice. Formal learning in social work education includes classroom and laboratory and is considered institutionalized learning, while informal learning is at fieldwork placement and considered unstructured (Papouli, 2014). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that social work education develops the knowledge and attitude and assesses the students (Jani et al., 2016). Identically, the study findings point out that social work education in the university provides training to the students in the field, which helps them to identify their needs and give plans to tackle the situations (Palma-García et al., 2018). Correspondently, the results of the study analyzed that social work education improves the quality of social services given to the public (Bogo & Sewell, 2019). Likewise, the study findings commission that social work education has a training system through which individuals become professionals. (Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2004). Moreover, the results of the study highlight that social work education includes practice skills, reflection, and feedback (Todd et al., 2019).

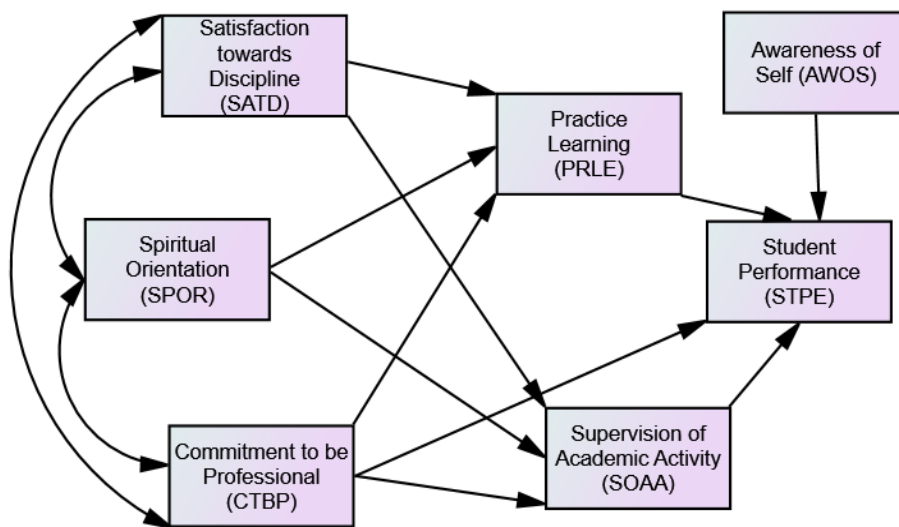
Fieldwork practice is aligned with social work education to improve the social work profession, where trainees experience their knowledge and skills (Woli, 2023). The study findings show that social work



training in fieldwork is an important component of social work education through which students practice professional social work (Tippa & Mane, 2018). Similarly, the primary data assert that fieldwork practice is an integral component of social work education (Jeyarani & Jebaseelan, 2017). Comparably, the study found that professional and theoretical knowledge in the curriculum of social work education is taught in the classroom, and technical skills and experience are advanced in the fieldwork practice (Todd et al., 2019). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that a social work practitioner, namely Mary Richmond, believes that fieldwork practice is complementary to social work education. Students of social work have to work half of their academic time in placement settings (Dhemba, 2012). Identically, the study findings point out that using practice in the field develops the knowledge and skills of the students in social work education (Walker & Gant, 2021). Correspondently, the results of the study analyzed that fieldwork placement of the students is introduced to enable the people to achieve the targets of the program successfully. Most students are employed with charity organizations (Scholar et al., 2014). Likewise, the study findings commission that the curriculum of social work covers knowledge and experience gained from the fieldwork practice (Sunirose, 2013).

Moreover, the results of the study highlight that fieldwork is a compulsory part of social work education (Dhemba, 2012). In addition, the study evaluates that experience gained in the fieldwork helps the students develop an awareness of self and operationalize ethics and values of social work. (Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, & Huggins, 2010). Besides, the study findings reveal that the structural, functional perspective and symbolic interactionist perspectives are two views of professional socialization in social work education. Views of the structural-functional perspective are students learn skills and knowledge in the classroom and through interaction with their peers, whereas the symbolic interactionist perspective is the motivation and commitment of the student to practice in the field (Simpson, 2015). The study findings show that large classes negatively impact the learning of the students. Students must improve their knowledge and skills to integrate theory with practice (Bogo & Sewell, 2019). Social work discipline is responsible for ensuring effective work with the people. (Nagy & Falk, 2000). Similarly, the primary data assert that fieldwork practice is a major determinant of social work education. Knowledge of the field supervisor is very important for enhancing the skills of the students (Lam et al., 2007). Hence, the following conceptual model has been developed:

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



Model Description

This model, as mentioned in Figure 1, uses three independent variables (satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional), two path variables (practice learning and supervision of academic activity), one dependent variable (student performance), and one intervening variable (awareness of self).

The Data and Methods

The study has been based on a quantitative approach. It uses the data from a sample of 347 social work discipline students from public sector universities through a proportionate random sampling technique. It is very important to mention that the students have been enrolled in the BS (4 Years) program. A cross-sectional survey was conducted, and a structured questionnaire was administered to collect information from social work students. The model has been tested, and different variables have been used. This model uses three independent variables (satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to being professional), two path variables (practice learning and supervision of academic activity), and one dependent variable, i.e., student performance. It is reported here that awareness of self variable has been used as an intervening variable in the model. The model has been pretested using the structural equation modeling technique. The effects of the model have been presented in the results and discussions section of the paper.

Results and Discussion

This section provides the identification of the students enrolled in social work discipline in public sector universities in the Punjab province. Further, it also furnishes the direct and indirect effects of the model, as mentioned at the end of the review section of this paper.

Table 1

Distribution of the students by their identification

Semester Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
1 st Semester	47	13.54
3 rd Semester	71	20.46
5 th Semester	81	23.34
7 th Semester	148	42.65
Total	347	100.0
Program of the Students		
BS	312	89.91
MA	35	10.09
Total	347	100.0
University Name		
Islamia University of Bahawalpur	93	26.8
University of Sargodha	125	36.0
University of the Punjab	129	37.2
Total	347	100.0

Table 1 reveals the distribution of the students by their identification in terms of semester and program. The data indicates that there are 42.65 percent of social work students are enrolled in the 7th semester, and 23.34 percent of the students are studying in the 5th semester in the department. However, a smaller proportion of 13.54 percent are enrolled in the 1st semester. The data indicates that there are 89.91 percent of social work students are enrolled in BS programs. However, a smaller proportion of 10.09 percent of the students are enrolled in MA programs. The data indicates that there are 37.2 percent of the social work students are enrolled at the University of Punjab, and 36 percent of the students are studying at the University of the Sargodha. However, a smaller proportion of 26.8 are enrolled in Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Table 2

Direct effects of the model

Variables	Standardized Regression Weights	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CTBP ---> PRLE	.580	.701	.052	13.444	***
SATD ---> SOAA	.365	.391	.044	8.839	***



SPOR	---	SOAA	.175	.226	.052	4.327	***
SPOR	---	PRLE	.104	.125	.051	2.435	.015
SATD	---	PRLE	.180	.178	.043	4.110	***
CTBP	---	SOAA	.407	.530	.053	9.970	***
SOAA	---	STPE	.256	.591	.099	5.975	***
CTBP	---	STPE	.254	.765	.153	4.989	***
PRLE	---	STPE	.403	1.004	.114	8.814	***
AWOS	---	STPE	.128	.370	.091	4.072	***
Covariances							
SATD	<-->	SPOR		5.225	.640	8.166	***
CTBP	<-->	SPOR		4.110	.521	7.883	***
CTBP	<-->	SATD		5.312	.637	8.340	***
Variances							
CTBP				8.701	.662	13.153	***
SATD				12.892	.980	13.153	***
SPOR				8.870	.674	13.153	***
e1				5.593	.425	13.153	***
e4				9.407	.715	13.153	***
e2				5.823	.443	13.153	***
e3				26.811	2.038	13.153	***

Chi-square = 200.010, df = 8, Probability level = .000, AGFI=.920, GFI=.935, CFI=.938, RMSEA=.067

H1: Commitment to be professional, spiritual orientation, and satisfaction towards discipline have a direct effect on practice learning.

Data presented in Table 2 asserts that there is a direct effect of commitment to be professional, spiritual orientation, and satisfaction towards discipline on practice learning. The hypothesis has been accepted with a p-value less than 0.05. Hence, it is confirmed that commitment to be professional, spiritual orientation, and satisfaction towards discipline have a direct effect on practice learning. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. The study findings show that academic learning, moral and personal development, satisfaction with college, and professional commitment are associated with practice and service learning (Eyler et al., 2001; Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Similarly, the primary data assert that professional commitment is directly linked with the socioeconomic characteristics of the students and their practice in clinical or community settings (Freund et al., 2013). Comparably, the study found that spirituality among the students is to create learning experiences (Phillips, 2014). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that professional commitment has an impact on the professional targets of students of professional training and social workers for learning practice (Whiting et al., 2008).

H2: Satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional have a direct effect on the supervision of academic activity.

Data presents in Table 2 asserts that there is a direct effect of satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional on supervision of academic activity. The hypothesis has been accepted with a p-value less than 0.05. Hence, it is confirmed that satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional have a direct effect on the supervision of academic activity. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. Identically, the study findings point out that supervision of academic activity has a direct impact on achieving academic goals (Renata et al., 2018). Correspondingly, the results of the study showed that students enhance different skills through academic supervision (Nordentoft et al., 2013). Likewise, the study findings commission that supervisors and students develop professional understanding among the students (Bennett, 2008). Moreover, the results of the study highlight that supervision involves professional development, including administrative and management activities (Alschuler et al., 2015; Ketner et al., 2017).

H3: Supervision of academic activity and commitment to be professional has a direct effect on student performance.

Data presents in Table 2 asserts that there is a direct effect of supervision of academic activity and commitment to be professional on student performance. The hypothesis has been accepted with a p-value less than 0.05. Hence, it is confirmed that supervision of academic activity and commitment to be professional have a direct effect on student performance. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. The study findings show that academic supervision in the institutions and teacher's observations enhance student performance (Mavindu, 2013). Similarly, the primary data assert that the academic performance of the student is improved through supervision, which includes planning and guidance (Okendu, 2012). Comparably, the study found that supervision of academic activity enhances the quality of learning among the students for achieving the desired targets of the students, teachers, and institutions (Comfort et al., 2017). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that the performance of the supervisors affects the performance of the students (Delima, 2015).

H4: Practice learning and awareness of self has a direct effect on student performance.

Data presented in Table 2 asserts that practice learning and awareness of self have a direct effect on student performance. The hypothesis has been accepted with a p-value less than 0.05. Hence, it is confirmed that the practice of learning and awareness of self have a direct effect on student performance. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. The study findings show that awareness of self is positively associated with learning achievements and student performance and negatively associated with fear (Roeser & Peck, 2009). Identically, the study findings point out that the learning experience mediated with self-regulation and motivation is associated with the academic performance of the student (Ning & Downing, 2012). Correspondently, the results of the study analyzed that practice learning experiences enhance the performance of the students (Freeman et al., 2014).

Table 3

Indirect effects of the model

Indirect Path	Unstandardized Estimate	Lower	Upper	P-Value	Standardized Estimate
SPOR --> SOAA --> STPE	0.134	0.073	0.213	0.001	0.045***
SPOR --> PRLE --> STPE	0.125	0.034	0.244	0.027	0.042*
SATD --> SOAA --> STPE	0.231	0.153	0.320	0.001	0.093***
SATD --> PRLE --> STPE	0.179	0.107	0.274	0.000	0.072***
CTBP --> SOAA --> STPE	0.313	0.215	0.430	0.001	0.104***
CTBP --> PRLE --> STPE	0.704	0.542	0.879	0.001	0.234***

Significance of Estimates: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.010, * p < 0.050, † p < 0.100

H5: Spiritual orientation has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of the academic activity.

Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of spiritual orientation on student performance through the mediation of supervision of academic activity. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.001. Hence, it is confirmed that spiritual orientation has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of academic activity. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. The study findings show that spirituality in social work education is very important for dealing with ethical issues and preparing students for better performance (Canda et al., 2004). Similarly, the primary data assert that spirituality and religiosity are important in the social work profession and education to identify the spiritual needs of the clients (Kopacz et al., 2015). Comparably, the study found



that students and practitioners of social work have strong faith that religious and spiritual beliefs are considered to cope with many social problems (Rinkel et al., 2018).

H6: Spiritual orientation has an indirect effect on student performance through the mediation of practice learning.

Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of spiritual orientation on student performance through the mediation of practice learning. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.027. Hence, it is confirmed that Spiritual orientation has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of practice learning. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education. The study findings show that spiritual orientation is linked with the practice of learning and self-understanding (Driver, 2005; Harrison, 2010; Rappel, 2017). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that learning practice supports the theological stance of spirituality and personal development (Fenwick & English, 2004; Plumb, 2008). Identically, the study findings point out that spiritual orientation has a positive relation with the academic performance of the student (Albursan et al., 2016; Brazdău & Mihai, 2011; Rustan, 2010). Correspondingly, the results of the study showed that there is a strong relationship between spiritual orientation and the academic performance of the student (Napone & Lagura, 2023; Pong, 2017).

H7: Satisfaction towards discipline has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of academic activity.

Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of Satisfaction towards discipline on student performance through the mediation of supervision of academic activity. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.001. Hence, it is confirmed that Satisfaction with discipline has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of academic activity. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education (Shoaib et al., 2023; Shoaib & Ullah, 2019, 2021a, 2021b; Shoaib et al., 2022). Likewise, the study findings commission that the focus of the social work discipline is on learning skills and becoming competent in the field (Eltaiba & Ndoeye, 2018).

H8: Satisfaction towards discipline has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of practice learning.

Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of satisfaction towards discipline on student performance through the mediation of practice learning. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.000. Hence, it is confirmed that satisfaction with discipline has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of practice learning. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education (Shoaib et al., 2021; Shoaib et al., 2022, 2023; Shoaib et al., 2021). The study findings show that students are satisfied with the teaching discipline for practice learning to enhance their skills (Wilson & Kelly, 2010). Similarly, the primary data assert that satisfaction with the educational institution is responsible for changing the critical thinking and practice learning of the students (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Comparably, the study found that experimental learning in social work education contributes to student performance by practicing professional skills (Fortune et al., 2007).

H9: Commitment to be professional has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of academic activity.

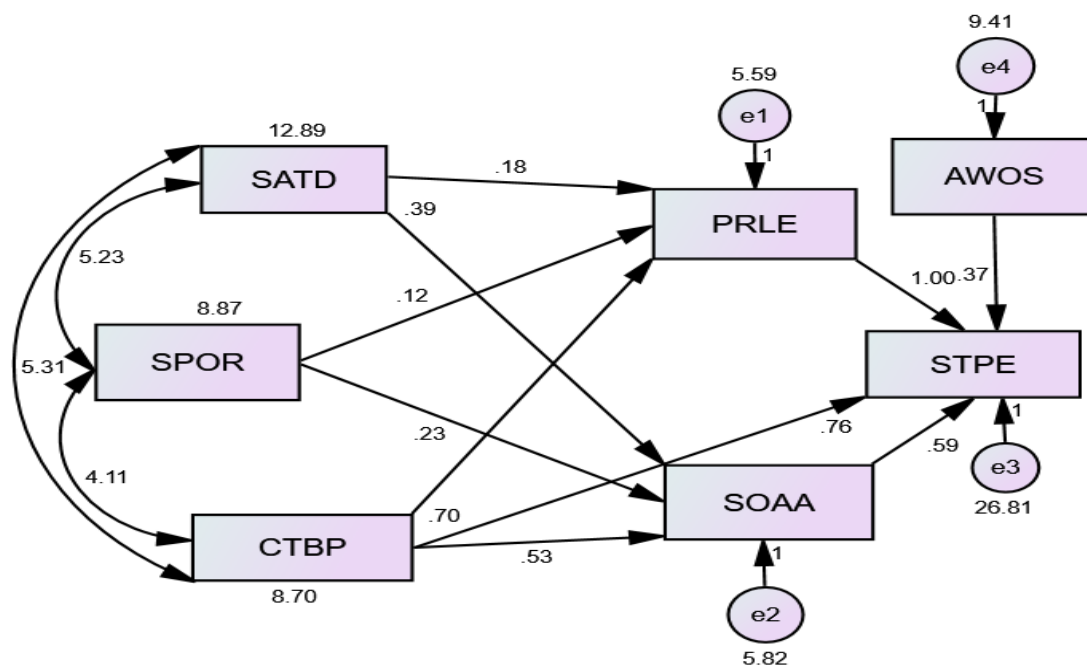
Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of commitment to be professional on student performance through the mediation of supervision of academic activity. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.001. Hence, it is confirmed that commitment to be professional has an indirect effect on student performance through the meditation of supervision of academic activity. The study findings are aligned with the study findings of the previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education (Shoaib et al., 2021; Shoaib et al., 2022; Shoaib et al., 2021). Uniformly, the crux of the study examines that professional commitment among the employee or the student increases efficiency and

performance (Freund, 2006; Freund et al., 2013; Giffords, 2009). Identically, the study findings point out that commitment to be professional is a psychological aspect showing responsibility for the achievement of the goal and performance (Klein et al., 2012). Correspondingly, the results of the study showed that professional commitment is seen as strong among students at an early stage (Clements et al., 2014).

H10: Commitment to be professional has an indirect effect on student performance through the mediation of practice learning.

Data presents in Table 3 asserts that there is an indirect effect of commitment to be professional on student performance through the mediation of practice learning. The hypothesis has been accepted with p-value of 0.001. Hence, it is confirmed that commitment to be professional has an indirect effect on student performance through the mediation of practice learning. The study findings are aligned with the findings of previous studies conducted by several scholars in the field of social work education (Shoaib, 2021; Shoaib et al. et al., 2021). Likewise, the study findings commission that commitment to be personal and professional among the students of social work is developed by the practice in the field (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004). Moreover, the results of the study highlight that various factors are linked with the commitment to be professional among social work students having professional socialization (Wilson & McCrystal, 2007). In addition, the study evaluates the professional development and performance of the social work student as the outcome of professional commitment (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

Figure 2
Path diagram of the model



The path diagram, as mentioned in Figure 2, also provides the direct and indirect effects of the model.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion of the study outlines that satisfaction towards discipline and commitment to being professional, along with spiritual orientation, have favorable effects on student performance in the discipline of social work in the public sector universities of the Punjab province. Likewise, practice learning and supervision of academic activities have also been found to be a strong predictor of student performance. The study also found that awareness of self has positive effects on student performance. In the same way, the study found that satisfaction towards discipline, spiritual orientation, and commitment to be professional have indirect effects on social work student performance through the mediation of practice learning and supervision of academic activity.



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