

Institutional Capacity and Level of Engagement in Community Outreach Initiatives: A Study of Degree Colleges in Punjab

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Received on: 23-04-2024

Accepted on: 24-05-2024

Abstract

This study examines the institutional capacity and level of engagement in community outreach programs within degree colleges of Punjab. As higher education institutions play a crucial role in societal development, the effectiveness of their outreach initiatives has become increasingly important in fostering community linkages. The research explores how institutional resources, leadership, and infrastructure influence the success and sustainability of outreach programs. It was quantitative study the nature of the study was descriptive and survey type. All principals, and teachers of degree colleges in government degree colleges of Punjab was population of the study. There are total number of 618 degree colleges in Punjab, in which 12827 are the teaching staff in all degree colleges in Punjab. The sample of the study was selected at three stages. At first stage, 09 districts out of all 36 districts of Punjab were selected randomly. At the second stage, one male degree college and one female degree college from each district, total 18 colleges (09 male +09 female) were selected as a sample of the study. At the third stage, one principal of each sample college and 30 students and 10 teachers were systematically selected from each college. Systematically sampling techniques was used in the selection of the sample. In this way total number of students, teachers and principals were 540, 180 and 18 respectively. Self-developed questionnaires were used as research tools. Three questionnaires were used one for students, second for teachers and third for heads of the institutes. Validity of the research tools were ensured through expert opinions while the reliability of the questionnaires for this study were determined through the Cronbach Alpha. The questionnaires were administered through prepaid postage and e-mail to the respective respondents but where applicable these were handed over to the respondents personally and through friends. The male respondents were also reminded through telephone calls. Data was cleaned and codified before undertaking its statistical analysis with the help of SPSS. Statistical tools including mean, standard deviation and t-test was used for this purpose.

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Keywords: Institutional Capacity, Engagement, Community Outreach Programs

Introduction

In recent years, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been increasingly recognized as important players in dynamic social change and adopting viable development through community engagement initiatives. These initiatives, often discussed to as community outreach programs, comprise direct involvement with local communities to address their socio-economic, cultural, and educational needs. According to Gibbison et al. (2018), community outreach programs not merely help in linking gaps between academic institutions and society but also provide learners with chances for experiential learning and the growth of civic duty. Nevertheless, the achievement of such programs is mainly depending upon the institutional capability of these colleges, comprising their human, financial, and infrastructural resources, in addition to the level of commitment from both faculty and students.

Punjab, the most populated province of Pakistan, has a various educational background with degree colleges playing a key role in influencing the academic and socio-economic fabric of the region. Whereas these institutions have been gradually elaborate in outreach programs, there is inadequate research analyzing the institutional ability and commitment stages compulsory to certify the achievement of such initiatives. Various degree colleges, mainly in rural areas, face resource restrictions and inadequate institutional funding, which hinders their capability to design and implement actual outreach programs. Researches for example Ahmed et al. (2020) and Khan & Malik (2019) have revealed that insufficient funding, lack of professional teachers, and inadequate teamwork between educational institutions and local communities are some of the obstacles for effective community outreach initiatives.

An important research gap present in accepting how institutional capacity within Punjab's degree colleges effects their commitment in community outreach initiatives. Whereas numerous researchers have discovered the wider role of HEIs in community service, minute devotion has been assumed to degree colleges, which often lack the resources and reflectivity of bigger universities, but play equal role like local development. Furthermore, present study often emphases on the consequences of outreach initiatives rather than the institutional features that permit or delay engagement in these initiatives. For example, Khalid (2021) describes the constructive effect of community outreach initiatives on student learning and community well-being, the research doesn't address the institutional challenges that degree colleges face in sustaining these community outreach programs.

Moreover, there is an absence of comparative analysis between urban and rural degree colleges in Punjab regarding their capacity to engage in community outreach. Urban colleges may have better access to resources, partnerships, and infrastructure, while rural colleges often serve communities with greater socio-economic challenges but operate with limited institutional support. This inequality makes a gap in accepting the various institutional capabilities and engagement levels across different contexts within Punjab's educational system.

The purpose of this research was to fill this gap by analyzing the institutional capacity and engagement in community outreach programs in Punjab's degree colleges. It was analyzed that various factors i.e. leadership, faculty involvement, funding, and external partnerships

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impact the ability of these institutions to design and implement effective outreach initiatives. Thus, this study was providing a complete understanding of the challenges and prospects facing degree colleges in Punjab, offering practical suggestions for policymakers and educational leaders to boost community associations as well as develop sustainable development through higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education plays important role to address socio-economic development and societal challenges with the help of community outreach programs. In Pakistan especially in Punjab, degree colleges are vibrant institutions in the field of education, particularly in helping local communities. Although, despite their potential, various degree colleges try their best to implement actual community outreach programs because of boundaries in institutional capability and different stages of engagement from faculty, students, and administrators. There is a significant gap in indulgent how institutional factors for example funding, leadership, infrastructure, and partnerships influence the capacity of these colleges to effectively design, implement, and sustain community outreach programs. Furthermore, inequalities between urban and rural colleges in Punjab further confuse the situation, as rural organisations often face better resource limitations whereas addressing the requirements of further defenceless communities.

The lack of realistic studies exactly directing on the institutional capacity and engagement in community outreach programs within Punjab's degree colleges presents a serious gap in the literature. Deprived of a strong indulgent of the challenges and opportunities tackled by these colleges, it develops problematic for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to express real approaches to boost community engagement. This study pursues to discuss initiatives in degree colleges of Punjab, thus contributing to the development of institutional practices and community linkages in the province.

Literature Review

Higher education institutions play important role to develop social responsibilities among students and other stakeholders at local and regional level through community outreach initiatives. These initiatives not merely help to address unrelenting community needs however deliver students with chances to involve in experiential learning and civic engagement. Moreover, the efficiency of such programs is mostly depending upon the institutional size and level of engagement within these institutes. This literature review observes earlier studies on institutional capacity, faculty and student engagement, and the role of organisations in community outreach programs, with an emphasis on the circumstance of degree colleges in Punjab.

Institutional Capacity in Higher Education

The capacity of educational institutions to involve in community outreach is inclined by numerous factors, containing financial resources, leadership, infrastructure, and human capital. Ahmed, Zia, and Rafiq (2020), revealed that institutional ability is an important factor of the ability of HEIs to maintain community engagement programs. The research highpoints that various degree colleges in Pakistan, mainly in rural areas, face important resource

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limitations that maximum their capacity to successfully implement outreach initiatives. These limits comprise inadequate funding, inadequate physical infrastructure, and a lack of trained workers to manage outreach activities.

Faculty and Student Engagement

Faculty and student participation is other serious element of effective community outreach initiatives. According to Gibbison, Walker, and Evans (2018), faculty engagement is important for the achievement of outreach programs, as they take proficiency, mentorship, and leadership to these ingenuities. Moreover, researches propose that faculty members often face challenges in balancing outreach activities with their teaching and research duties. This is mainly unmistakable in degree colleges, where the teaching load is often high, parting little time for engagement in community outreach (Saeed et al., 2021).

The Role of Partnerships in Community Outreach

In Pakistan, partnerships between degree colleges and external organizations have been limited, particularly in rural areas (Ahmed et al., 2020). These institutions often lack the administrative capacity to establish and maintain long-term partnerships, which are critical for the sustainability of outreach initiatives. Furthermore, many degree colleges operate in isolation from broader networks of educational and community institutions, limiting their ability to engage in collaborative projects.

Urban vs. Rural Disparities in Community Outreach

According to Khan and Malik (2019), differences, observing that rural colleges are often incapable to involve in outreach initiatives at the similar level as their urban counterparts. Whereas, the researchers maintain that rural institutes have the potential to play a transformative role in their communities if given satisfactory support. This fact to a need for targeted involvements that address the explicit challenges faced by rural institutions in Punjab.

Research Methodology

It was quantitative study the nature of the study was descriptive and survey type. All principals, and teachers of degree colleges in government degree colleges of Punjab was population of the study. There are total number of 618 degree colleges in Punjab, in which 12827 are the teaching staff in all degree colleges in Punjab. The sample of the study was selected at three stages. At first stage, 09 districts out of all 36 districts of Punjab were selected randomly. At the second stage, one male degree college and one female degree college from each district, total 18 colleges (09 male +09 female) were selected as a sample of the study. At the third stage, one principal of each sample college and 30 students and 10 teachers were systematically selected from each college. Systematically sampling techniques was used in the selection of the sample. In this way total number of students, teachers and principals were 540, 180 and 18 respectively. Self-developed questionnaires were used as research tools. Three questionnaires were used one for students, second for teachers and third for heads of the institutes. Validity of the research tools were ensured through expert opinions while the reliability of the questionnaires for this study were determined through

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the Cronbach Alpha. The questionnaires were administered through prepaid postage and e-mail to the respective respondents but where applicable these were handed over to the respondents personally and through friends. The male respondents were also reminded through telephone calls. Data was cleaned and codified before undertaking its statistical analysis with the help of SPSS. Statistical tools including mean, standard deviation and t-test was used for this purpose.

Results

Table 1 *Perception of Heads Regarding the Level of Community Linkage and Outreach Programmes*

Statements	N	SA	A	N	D	SDA
Well thought Outreach plan of extension projects based on social needs and educational issues of the community.	18 f %	09 (50.0)	03 (16.7)	03 (16.7)	03 (16.7)	00 (00.0)
Participation of community members in planning and implementation of outreach programs/projects.	18 f %	06 (33.3)	03 (16.7)	06 (33.3)	03 (16.7)	00 (00.0)
Involvement and active roles of staff, teachers and students in community development and outreach projects.	18 f %	09 (50.0)	03 (16.7)	00 (00.0)	00 (0.0)	06 (33.3)
Evidence that services of students and teachers in the community are used to support and improve the academic programs.	18 f %	09 (50.0)	00 (00.0)	06 (33.3)	03 (16.7)	00 (00.0)
Fair, equitable and supportive policies and procedures regarding gender /minorities.	18 f %	06 (16.7)	03 (33.3)	03 (16.7)	00 (00.0)	06 (33.3)
Community links and outreach programs/projects in a conducive, open and harmonious environment and free of discrimination.	18 f %	06 (33.3)	06 (33.3)	00 (00.0)	06 (33.3)	00 (00.0)

Table 1 shows the perceptions of heads of institutions regarding the level of community linkage and outreach programs in degree colleges.

In table 1 Statement 1, which refers to the presence of a well-thought-out outreach plan for extension projects based on social needs and educational issues of the community, 50.0% of respondents strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, 16.7% were neutral, 16.7% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed.

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Statement 2 in table 1, is relates to the participation of community members in the planning and implementation of outreach programs, 50.0% strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, none were neutral, none disagreed, and 33.3% strongly disagreed.

In table 1 Statement 3, concerning the involvement and active roles of staff, teachers, and students in community development and outreach projects, 50.0% strongly agreed, none agreed, 33.3% remained neutral, 16.7% disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

In statement 4, which observes whether the services of students and teachers in the community are used to support and improve academic programs, 33.3% strongly agreed, 16.7% agreed, 16.7% were neutral, none disagreed, and 33.3% strongly disagreed.

In Statement 5, which discourses fair, equitable, and supportive policies and procedures regarding gender and minorities, 16.7% strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed, 16.7% remained neutral, none disagreed, and 33.3% strongly disagreed.

Lastly, table 1 statement 6, regarding community links and outreach programs being conducted in a conducive, open, and harmonious environment free from discrimination, 33.3% strongly agreed, 33.3% agreed, none were neutral, 33.3% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. It is founded that the majority of heads had a positive perception of their institution's engagement in community outreach, though there is a noticeable minority that held opposing views.

Table 2 Perception of Teachers Regarding the Level of Community Linkage and Outreach Programmes

Statements	N		SA	A	N	D	SDA
Well thought Outreach plan of extension projects based on social needs and educational issues of the community.	180	f %	47 (26.1)	35 (19.4)	72 (40.0)	11 (6.1)	15 (8.3)
Participation of community members in planning and implementation of outreach programs/projects.	180	f %	41 (22.8)	86 (47.8)	38 (21.1)	05 (2.8)	10 (5.6)
Involvement and active roles of staff, teachers and students in community development and outreach projects.	180	f %	41 (22.8)	58 (32.2)	66 (37.7)	00 (00.0)	15 (8.3)
Evidence that services of students and teachers in the community are used to support and improve the academic programs.	180	f %	41 (22.8)	51 (28.3)	66 (37.7)	12 (6.7)	10 (5.6)
Fair, equitable and supportive policies and procedures regarding gender /minorities.	180	f %	47 (26.1)	66 (37.7)	51 (28.3)	06 (3.3)	10 (5.6)

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Community links and outreach programs/projects in a conducive, open and harmonious environment and free of discrimination.	180	f	58	35	54	10 (5.6)	23 (12.8)
		%	(32.2)	(19.4)	(30.0)		

Table 2 illustrates the perceptions of teachers regarding the level of community linkage and outreach programs in degree colleges.

In table 2 Statement 1, which assesses the presence of a well-thought-out outreach plan based on social needs and educational issues, 26.1% of respondents strongly agreed, 19.4% agreed, 40.0% remained neutral, 6.1% disagreed, and 8.3% strongly disagreed.

With regard to Statement 2, regarding community member participation in the planning and implementation of outreach programs, 22.8% strongly agreed, 47.8% agreed, 21.1% were neutral, 2.8% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed.

Statement 3 in table 2, which speaks the involvement and active roles of staff, teachers, and students in community development projects, 22.8% strongly agreed, 32.2% agreed, 37.7% were neutral, none disagreed, and 8.3% strongly disagreed.

With respect to statement 4 observes whether the services of students and teachers in the community are utilized to support and enhance academic programs. Here, 22.8% strongly agreed, 28.3% agreed, 37.7% remained neutral, 6.7% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed.

For Statement 5, concerning fair, equitable, and supportive policies regarding gender and minorities, 26.1% strongly agreed, 37.7% agreed, 28.3% were neutral, 3.3% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed.

It is founded that a majority of teachers grip a positive perception of the outreach initiatives, although a significant proportion remained neutral or had concerns, indicating areas for potential improvement in community engagement efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results propose that while there is a constructive proclivity regarding community outreach among heads of degree colleges, there are significant challenges and differences that need to be addressed. This study reveals the obligation for improved engagement plans, stronger policies, and developed teamwork with community members to support the impact of outreach programs in Punjab's degree colleges. Addressing these challenges can lead to more operative and comprehensive community engagement initiatives that benefit both educational institutions and the communities they serve. In conclusion, addressing the concerns outstretched and development of better clearness and participation in community outreach initiatives may lead to more effective conglomerates between degree colleges and their surrounding communities, eventually inspiring both educational experiences and community development.

Recommendations

1. Boost more contribution from community members in the planning and

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implementation of outreach programs. Launch formal procedures for feedback and teamwork, i.e., community advisory boards, to confirm that outreach initiatives support with community needs.

2. Degree colleges may generate comprehensive outreach plans that are based on thorough assessments of local social and educational issues. These plans may comprise vibrant goals, policies, and assessment metrics to measure efficiency.

3. Encourage teamwork among various departments within degree colleges to build interdisciplinary outreach initiatives. This can influence diverse proficiency and resources to address difficult community matters more effectually.

4. Encourage student participation in outreach activities through service-learning opportunities, internships, and volunteer programs. Engagement of the learners may improve their educational experience whereas providing valued services to the community.

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