

FACTORS INFLUENCING CURRENT LEVELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, BEST PRACTICES AND LIMITATIONS

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Abstract

The paper intends to explore the factors that influence the current levels of community engagement and social responsibility activities, the present best practices and limitations in HEIs from the perspectives of faculty members. Primary data has been collected from 200 faculty members by purposive and cross-sectional sampling method. The data collected has been analyzed by using descriptive statistics, factor analysis and Word clouds in R. Results from factor analysis indicate that there are four major factors identified as Motivation and Support by Stakeholders, Institutional system and support, Instruction and Research and Support Factors, which influence community engagement & social responsibility inside higher educational institutes. Present best practices indicate that community engagement and social responsibility is not-for-credit and volunteering based like NCC, NSS. Lack of time, lack of funding, lack of management support and hectic academic schedule are indicated as top most limitations expressed by faculty members.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Factors influencing current levels of community engagement, Best Practices and Limitations

1. INTRODUCTION

Social responsibility engagement activities in higher education in the context of India, is still under tapped. However there have been discussions at various levels, among different stakeholders in education domain with respect to enhancing the current levels of public arrangement inside higher learning institutions.

For understanding, factors influencing the current levels of community engagement and social responsibility activities, researchers first tried to understand the current community engagement practices and the level of involvement of the institution from the perspectives of the faculty. In their study[1] mention that Faculty perceive that their institution is mostly engaged with student initiatives and innovations for social activities. Not for credit, through student forums like NSS, NCC, Rotaract, Enactus, atc are widely prevalent which are mostly dependent on the student volunteerism and does not fetch them any credits in terms of assessment and evaluation. Faculty also view that the way existing subjects are taught through active teaching methods like experiential learning, service learning, field

work etc is another form of community engagement which is prevalent presently in HEIs. This is followed by faculty initiatives being encouraged, knowledge sharing with communities in terms of workshops, camps, trainings etc, and community based research carried on by the faculty and students. Faculty consultation services to the community and practitioners from the field co-teaching the subjects to make it more relevant and practical are also prevalent in their institution according to the faculty. They also state that community based internships and community engagement activities being credit based as a part of the curriculum for assessment and evaluation are less prevalent according to faculty involved in community engagement activities.

On an average, faculty members spend a little more than 4 hours per week on community engagement activities. Out of the total respondents 51% of the respondents are very often/highly involved and 49% of the respondents are rarely/sometimes involved. 66% of the respondents agreed that there are sufficient avenues to express social responsibility through community engagement activities in their institution. And around 56% of the faculty respondents agreed that their institution's contribution local community development is satisfactory.

Next it was important to understand the factors which influence the current community engagement practices and the current best practices of community engagement and social responsibility activities in HEIs. It was also thought important to understand the constraints in the way of enhancing community engagement and social responsibility activities from the perspective of faculty.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational institutions have to be more socially relevant to explore deeper dimensions of their prime functions of teaching and research. These explorations not only will benefit all the stakeholders but will also throw open various opportunities to build competencies required for the future among the student community. Identifying social problems and finding solutions for the same will develop deeper understanding of the subjects that students are studying. HEIs will build greater potential in teaching-learning and research aspects[1].

Further to understand and assesses the factors influencing the current levels of community engagement activities, best practices and limitations which are in the way of enhancing current levels of community engagement and social responsibility activities, this study has been carried out.

The "Report to the Nation[2]" of the National Knowledge Commission states, an excellence & number in advanced learning is suffering from quite a deep crisis. The National Service Scheme (NSS) was instituted in 1969 in India. The purpose of the same was to take on social responsibilities, however it is seen mere as an add-on activity to teaching-learning process. Though many higher educational institutions and universities

have NSS as an integral part and even though many scheduled events happen through NSS, it is perceived as an add on activity without there being any direct link to teaching and learning process. Therefore, though there is a contribution through NSS, it doesn't achieve intended outcomes directly related with the curriculum[3].

Rice university[4] have rightly mentioned in their work that the Vision and Mission of the organization must clearly define the CSR activities. They also state that through a separate entity at the organization, CSR activities can be well taken care. Similarly,[3] state that an institutional mechanism should create a practical method for public arrangement which is founded over some essential ideologies. Community engagement should be integrated in the teaching-learning process. Only then can it result in social change positively. This will transform education from a mere commodity into public good[5].

Holland [6] established theoretical structure in official features influencing arrangement which is popularly known as Holland Matrix. The matrix speaks about institutional factors that influence engagement - promotion, tenures, organizational missions, & hiring procedures administrative structures, student involvements, faculty involvements, communities, campus publication & further other management, plan & budget's distribution (internal)[7] to his matrix. Beatty [8] traces service learning movement and observes that it has evolved from communal movements with additional conventional educational process.

Kavatekar & Vijaya [9] observed in their paper that Public Schemes had an essential portion for book learning diverse subject. Few project must be deliberated in advance & must strongly combined into an abstract agenda. Students will always have this question of 'what is in it for them?' in whatever activities they take up. The given query is further to perform in what way so much of what they are performing would get replicated & interpreted into mark that was what is there for everybody for seeing at last in a day. Authors suggest that separately by experiential knowledge adding a lot of value, has to create something in terms of credits for students.

The review of the literature of the past studies indicates that Social Responsibility is not integrated powerfully into the curriculum through instruction and research. There have been many institutional factors which influence the community engagement and social responsibility activities which have their own benefits for the institution, communities, faculty and students.

Research Questions:

- What are the factors that influence the current levels of community engagement & social responsibility activities inside HEI?

- What are the present best practices of community engagement & social responsibility activities for HEIs from faculty perspective?
- What are the major limitations that HEIs face to express public arrangement & communal accountability activities?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design:

A purposive & cross-sectional sampling method has been adopted. Totally responses collected from 200 respondents were considered fit for further analysis. SPSS 20 was used and Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, Factor Analysis and Word Clouds in R were used for analysis and interpretation. To study the factors that influence the current levels of community engagement & social responsibility activities inside HEIs exploratory factor analysis test was done.

3.2. Sample:

A structured questionnaire for collecting the data was administered to faculty in HEIs in the city of Bangalore which was divided into four different categories like State University Affiliated Colleges, Autonomous Colleges, Deemed to be University/Colleges, Private University. Care was taken to cover at least two under each of the category, so that the study will be representative of diverse kinds of institutes in higher educations at Bengaluru. Further, care was taken to collect responses across different disciplines which have been categorized as for the purpose of analyzing the data into Arts/Humanities/Languages, Commerce/Management, Science/Engineering/Medicine.

Only Faculties involved in one or other way in socially responsible activities, being full time regular faculties in higher educational institutions, working at under graduate or post graduate levels were included.

3.3. Instrument:

- Community arrangement - explained through Carnegie Foundations, "is the mutually beneficial exchange of information and resources between institutions of higher education and their wider communities in a sense of cooperation and reciprocity.... enhance education, teaching, and learning; prepare trained, active citizens; reinforce democratic ideals and civic responsibility; resolve important social issues; and contribute to the public good [10]."
- Social Responsibility - Social Responsibility is defined as contributing back to the society for a greater good with or without personal benefit in the areas where society needs us to contribute to bridge the gaps between expected and the actual. It is

pooling of ideas, resources, building of community strength and harnessing society's potential for the common good of all.

- Higher education – includes all under-graduate and post-graduate studies.

3.4. Data Collection:

To test if the data is likely factorizable KMO & Bartlett's' tests was done. Bartlett's' tests of circularity indicated that an information was likely factorizable being statistically significant ($p < .0005$). The KMO measure is 0.932, which is very good; or "Marvelous". The four components explain 62.417% of the total variance.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix for- a) Motivation and Support by Stakeholders, b) Institutional System and Support, c) Instruction and Research, d) Support Factors

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Q15p	.729			
Q15q	.707			
Q15l	.702			
Q15r	.679			
Q15o	.666			
Q15w	.589			
Q15u	.568			
Q15m	.551			
Q15e	.500			
Q15v	.462			
Q15t	.446			
Q15c		.814		
Q15b		.798		
Q15a		.746		
Q15d		.707		
Q15i		.559		
Q15h		.538		
Q15g			.745	
Q15f			.739	
Q15k			.728	
Q15n			.471	
Q15s				.790
Q15j				.778

There are many hurdles in HEIs pertaining to enhancing the current levels of community engagement and social responsibility practices. The below mentioned Table 2 indicates the responses of the faculty members:

Table 2: Limitations of Higher Education Institutions Pertaining For Enhancing the Present Level of Community Engagement& Social Responsibility Practices

LIMITATIONS	N	Percent	Rank
Funding	55	21%	2
Curriculum/Policy	14	5%	6
Management Support	52	20%	3
Academic Schedule	68	26%	1
Attitude	35	13%	4
Co-Curricular/Extra-Curricular Activities	12	5%	6
Collaborations/Partnerships/Community	29	11%	5
Total	265	100%	

3.5. Data Analysis:

- Out of 200 respondents around 57% were Junior Faculty (Less than 35 Yrs) and 43% were Senior Faculty (Above 35 Yrs).
- Gender-wise Male represented 47% and Female 53% of the total respondents.
- 48.5% of the respondents were Post Graduates and 51.5% had qualifications above PG.
- While analyzing the years of experience, majority of the respondents, i.e., 65.5% had experience between 0 -10 Yr and about 34.5% had more than 10 years of experience.
- Data was collected across the disciplines. There were about 32.5% of the respondents who belonged to Arts/Humanities/Languages, 26% belonged to Science/Engineering/Medicine and about 41.5% belonged to Commerce/Management stream.
- Data was also collected across different types of institutions. 26% of the faculty members were from Govt/State University Affiliated colleges, majority of 55.5% belonged to Deemed university category, 7.5% were from Autonomous colleges and 10.5% of the respondents belonged to Private Universities.
- 51% of the respondents said they are very often/highly involved in community engagement activities and about 49% of the respondents said they involved in community engagement activities only sometimes/rarely. So we can see that when it comes to involvement levels faculty members seem to be almost equally divided.
- 96.5% of the respondents said that there is a presence of community engagement practices in their institutions; whereas only 3.5% of the faculty members said that the community engagement practices are not present in their institution.

- 66% of the respondents said there are sufficient avenues in their institutions through which they express social responsibility. Only 12% of the respondents said that there aren't sufficient avenues in their institution to express social responsibility. About 22% of the respondents chose to remain neutral.
- When it comes to the question of faculty being satisfied with current levels of community engagement, about 55.5% of the faculty members said that they are satisfied with the current levels of community engagement and it contributing to the communities around. 13.5% of the respondents were not satisfied with the current levels of community engagement practices making a great contribution. About 31% of the respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the contribution of existing levels of community engagement.

Above points indicate demographic profile, involvement levels, their agreement for sufficient avenues being there and their satisfaction levels with present levels of community engagement & social responsibility activities[1].

Cronbach's Alpha for 23 items of variables is 0.923 was done. The reliability test analysis brings out that factors influencing current levels of community engagement have a good internal consistency.

From the above Table 1, we describe the rotated component matrix and is further described below-

Component 1 Motivation and Support by Stakeholders

Component 1 indicates all the aspects various stakeholders and their motivation levels and support towards community engagement activities in the HEIs. These items indicate that Faculty, Students, Communities, Collaborations with Corporates, Practitioners, NGOs, and Research Organizations etc, their motivation levels and their support extended towards community engagement have an influence over a present level for engagement inside HEIs. It was inevitable that for greater community engagement and social responsibility from higher educational institutions all the stake holders need to support and definitely that will also act as a motivating factor to enhance the current levels.

Component 2 Institutional System and Support

Component 2 indicates that Institutional structure and support involving aspects of there being sufficient funding, leadership supporting the community engagement activities, community engagement being part of the mission, Communities being interested to partnering with the institution, top admin supporting and there being structure and governing mechanism to support community engagement activities. This is another important factor influencing current levels of community engagement activities in HEIs. Without institutional system and support, enhanced levels of community engagement and social responsibility at higher educational institutions cannot be achieved.

Component 3 Instruction and Research

Component 3 indicates all those variables which are related with instruction and research like active pedagogy, research, initiatives and innovations. If faculty evaluation includes a dimension of their contribution to community engagement activities, it influences the instruction and research of faculty. These factors influence the current level for community engagement activities inside the HEIs & instruction and research are the prime ways through which greater levels of community engagement and social responsibility can be accomplished.

Component 4 Support Factors

Component 4 emphasizes on other support factors like institution being involved in solving local problems and building capacity of the local community. It also indicates the students' motivation levels. Involvement of institution and students being motivated influence the present level for public arrangement activities in HEIs.

Above components are major factors influencing the present level for community engagement inside HEIs as explored in factor analysis.

Best Practices in HEIs: The best practices are indicated as shown in word cloud below:



Figure 1: Word Cloud for Current Best Practices in Higher Education Institution

The word cloud clearly indicates the current best practices in HEIs is in the Figure 1. The most frequently appearing words are students and community. Faculty have mentioned best practices related with NSS, NCC, Red Cross, CSA, conducting blood donation camps, free training and programs for various communities. Various activities related with students which are oriented towards social service, health camps, skill development programs for women, SHGs, rural communities etc are the best practices listed by faculty.

Best practices can be seen to be mainly from the current community engagement practices and cannot be said to be the only ways to be engaged in social responsibility practices.

Limitations in HEIs: There are many hurdles in HEIs pertaining to enhancing the current levels of community engagement and social responsibility practices. As can be see above when asked about the top most limitations in the way of enhancing community engagement in HEIs respondents listed Academic Schedule being hectic, followed by Lack of Funding for such activities, Lack of Management Support in terms of motivation in terms incentives monetary or otherwise, encouragement in terms of it being part of professional commitment like being part of the workload etc. These top three limitations are followed by other limitations like Lack of appropriate attitude and awareness among non-teaching & teaching staffs & management, Lack of Collaborations/Partnerships with Business Houses, NGOs, Governmental bodies and with Local communities, Lack of Community engagement being part of the Curriculum or Policy and Lack of encouragement for Co-Curricular and Extra Curricular activities.



Figure 2: Word Cloud for the Same Limitations of Higher Education Institutions That Are Listed In the Table 2

Above Figure 2, the word cloud indicates the same limitations as listed above. The most frequently appearing words are, time, lack, students, community, funds, funding, constraints etc. As can be seen lack of time and other academic schedule related constraints, lack of funding and lack of motivation for faculty and students for community engagement work are the topmost limitations. Other limitations listed indicate lack of partnerships, lack of relevant curriculum, lack of appropriate attitude for community engagement work, lack of it being part of the workload of the faculty are few other important limitations listed by the faculty members.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Noteworthy things about engagement of institution for the empowerment of the local community (best practices):

Word clouds faculty responses indicate the notably good things about the engagement of institution for the empowerment of the local community are mostly related with NSS, NCC, Rotaract, Red Corss, workshops, awareness camps, field trips, skill development activities in rural areas, social service activities by students, Interestingly faculty members also indicate research projects/programs as important activities among community engagement activities.

Top three community engagement are Student initiatives/innovations, not for credit activities (through student volunteerism and student forums) and teaching existing subjects through active teaching methods like experiential learning, field work, service learning etc. Very interestingly the same can be seen in the best practices mentioned by the respondents. There is a clear relationship between what HEIs are involved in and what they have cited as best practices in HEIs.

2. Constraints/Limitations in the way of engagement of the HEIs for empowerment of the local community:

Faculty recognize hectic academic schedule as the topmost challenge followed by lack of funding and lack of management support in the way of community engagement for local community development. Lack of right attitude, lack of collaborations and lack of relevant curriculum and lack of encouragement for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are some other limitations listed by faculty.

3. Factors influencing Community Engagement and Social Responsibility Activities:

The principal component analysis (PCA) is done on the questionnaire having 23 variables which signified current levels of Community engagement. A complete Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) measures is 0.932 by a particular KMO's measure each higher to 0.7, classification of 'Marvelous' according to Kaiser. Bartlett's tests for circularity is scientifically important (probability < .0005), comprising that an information is likely factorable.

PCA revealed four elements, which have eigenvalues higher than 1 & that explains 45.335 %, 6.6950%, 5.708% & 4.679% of all variances, respectively.

The interpretation in data was consistent with the current levels of community engagement activities by loading of Stakeholders variables in Components 1, Institutional

System & Support components in Components 2, Instruction & Research items in Components 3 & Other Support Factors items on Component 4.

The principal factors identified help us in understanding the factors influencing the current levels of community engagement in HEIs.

3.1. Implications for Theory:

It can be seen that Management and Stakeholders, Institutional system and support, Instruction and Research and various Other Support factors have been immensely influencing the present levels of community engagement and social responsibility activities inside HEIs. A transformation in all the above components, especially the first three components will greatly enhance social engagement and responsibility inside HEIs.

3.2. Implications for Practice:

Making community engagement and social responsibility a part of a curriculum for evaluation and assessment will eliminate the constraint of hectic academic schedule which comes in the way of faculty contribution towards community engagement and social responsibility practices. Community engagement activities can be part of the workload of the faculty and also it could be incentivized. Lack of funding and lack of management support also can be addressed by greatly transforming the Stakeholders and Organizational System and Support components that influence these activities.

Instruction and Research component which has been influencing the current levels can be immensely contributed if more attention is paid to how community engagement and social responsibility activities presently take place.

5. CONCLUSION

Assessing the current levels of community engagement, best practices and limitations in the way gives us a clear understanding about the current levels of community engagement practices in HEIs. This further helps us to streamline and improvise community engagement and social responsibility inside higher educational institutes. It must far more beneficial to enhance current levels of community engagement and social responsibility in HEIs for that will greatly impact teaching-learning and research functions of HEIs. Institutional system and support, stakeholders, instruction and research - components as identified in PCA are very important factors which if looked into in detail and strengthened for the better outcomes in terms of enhanced community engagement and social responsibility practices can create great results for the institutional development and regional development as well. Concentrated efforts have to be made to streamline the community engagement and social responsibility at higher educational institutions by creating cohesive academic schedule. Funding constraint need to be

sorted out by focusing on building a strong relationship with the stakeholders who are an important influencing factor for community engagement and social responsibility. Management system within the higher educational system need to have structure and system that has the vision of community engagement and social responsibility for holistic development.

A great amount of social value can be imbibed by HEIs which will further percolate down to faculty and students, by enhancing the current levels of community engagement and social responsibility activities in HEIs. This will accomplish engagement of all sorts – faculty engagement, student engagement, institutional engagement and community engagement.

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