

**STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT AND VOLUNTEERISM AS
PREDICTORS OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT: A REVIEW IN THE
PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

There is growing awareness of how vital student leadership involvement and volunteering activities are in a university, especially in the Pakistani higher education context where institutions are aiming to boost student development, employability and civic involvement. This narrative literature is an examination of how students' leadership involvement and volunteerism can serve as a possible predictor of institutional commitment among undergraduate and postgraduate students. Based on theories such as Astin's student involvement theory, Tinto's integration model, social exchange theory and organizational commitment perspectives, the review captures the latest research in a synthesis to develop a conceptual understanding of these relationships. The paper critically analyzes the potential contribution of participation in leadership positions and volunteer work to improve students' sense of belonging, to promote social integration, to support students' institutional identification, and to increase affective commitment to their institutions. Special focus is placed on the Pakistani higher education landscape where leadership development and community service, both of which are largely under-researched and could have significant impact in improving the engagement of students and the quality of higher education institutions. The review reveals major research gaps, such as the lack of research examining these relationships in South Asian settings, and suggests a conceptual framework to inform future empirical research. The paper concludes that although there is theoretical and conceptual evidence of positive relationship between leadership involvement, volunteerism and institutional commitment, there is an urgent need for rigorous empirical studies based on empirical evidence in Pakistani HEIs to validate the relationship and inform the evidence-based action in HEIs in Pakistan.

Keywords: Student Leadership, Volunteerism, Institutional Commitment, Student Engagement, Higher Education, Pakistan, Student Involvement, Belongingness, Social Integration

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been transformed from a space for learning and academic study to a space for human development (Filho et al., 2025). In the modern age, universities are expected to produce students who are knowledgeable in their respective disciplines, critical thinkers, and leaders who have civic awareness and social responsibility, as well as a sense of belonging to the institution (Richard, 2017). There has been increasing focus on the co-curricular and extra-curricular aspects of student life due to the recognition that universities are places where engaged citizens and ethical leaders are formed (Chan et al., 2017). Beyond the classroom, students' involvement in their institutions through leadership roles (class representatives, student council membership, society leadership, peer mentoring, and campus ambassadors) is one of the most important ways they do so (Eva et al., 2018). At the same time, volunteerism, or the voluntary giving of time and effort to help communities, institutions or causes without payment, has proven to be a potent tool for social responsibility and meaningful involvement (Cnaan et al., 2021). These experiences seem to develop the sense of belonging in students towards their institutions, but the way they contribute to the sense of belonging has not been thoroughly examined in the context of higher education in Pakistan (Richard, 2017).

Students' institutional commitment is seen as a multi-faceted concept consisting of the emotional bond with the university, loyalty, identification with the institution's values and goals,

and a persistent desire to contribute and support the mission and development of the university (Snijders et al., 2021). This is different from but related to the general concepts of student engagement and retention, which is a stronger psychological and emotional connection between students and their school (Farrell et al., 2018).

1.2 Pakistani Higher Education Context

The higher education system in Pakistan has undergone a tremendous change in the last two decades, marked by a tremendous boost in the number of higher education institutions, enrolment of students, and the diversity of programmes offered (Bhuttah et al., 2024). The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has taken up a comprehensive reform to move towards quality assurance, institutional ranking and student-centered learning environment (Abbas et al., 2019). Nonetheless, despite these developments, many Pakistani higher education institutions are yet to overcome difficulties in creating meaningful engagement for students, leadership development, and building a sense of community and belonging within the institution (Adnan, 2020).

Although student associations, volunteer programmes, and leadership development programmes are present in Pakistani universities, they are not well documented and studied in terms of their scope, quality and influence on students' development and institutional engagement (Bhuttah et al., 2024). In addition, the institutional support, allocation of resources, and faculty participation in co-curriculum programming are not equal in public and private universities, which can result in differential opportunities for students to engage in co-curriculum (Prananto et al., 2025). While academic achievement and expertise are essential, they have been the main focus of attention throughout the years, leaving little room for consideration of the all-round development of student leaders and good citizens, especially when employers are increasingly seeking graduates with the ability to engage in interpersonal, communication and leadership roles (Jin et al., 2022).

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the theoretical significance of student leadership and volunteerism for student development and institutional improvement, and the fact that these experiences are widely encouraged in higher education institutions around the world, the mechanisms by which these experiences affect students' institutional commitment are still not well understood, especially in the context of higher education in Pakistan (Snijders et al., 2021). Although many studies have reported the positive outcomes of student involvement in retention, achievement, and development, the specific connection between leadership involvement, volunteerism, and institutional commitment has not been broadly investigated, nor has this connection been studied systematically in the Pakistani higher education context.

The lack of empirical studies on these relationships in Pakistan leaves a huge gap for evidence-based decision making by university administrators, student affairs professionals, and policymakers when it comes to allocating resources to leadership and volunteer programs (Heilporn et al., 2021). Further, a nuanced understanding of the context-sensitive perception and impact of leadership and volunteer opportunities on students in the Pakistani higher education environment is needed (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The main objective of this narrative literature review is to integrate the conceptual and empirical information available to gain insight into the possible predictive role of students' leadership and volunteerism on institutional commitment, especially in the context of HEIs in Pakistan.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Define and conceptualize the role of students in leadership roles in higher education;

2. Review the role and importance of volunteerism in the development of the student and institutional engagement;
3. Institutional commitment as a complex, psychological, social and educational phenomenon;
4. Examine theoretical and conceptual pathways that might lead to institutional commitment through involvement in leadership and volunteerism; and
5. Explain their relevance and applicability in the context of Pakistan's higher education system;
6. Propose a conceptual framework that can be used as a guide for future empirical research in this area.

1.5 Significance of the Review

A review has a meaning for several groups of stakeholders. It serves as a comprehensive and evidence-based summary of the value of student leadership and volunteer experiences to enhance institutional commitment and community. It is a conceptual foundation for student affairs professionals and career development officers in designing, developing, and advocating for high-quality co-curricular programming. It conveys to faculty advisers and society mentors the developmental significance of their role as advisor to student leaders and volunteers. It helps policy makers in the HEC and provincial education departments to understand how policies and resource allocation decisions in the institution can either support or impede meaningful student engagement. It validates students' contributions as leaders and volunteers, and offers evidence of the impact of their involvement in personal growth and institutional strengthening. Lastly, from the researcher and scholar point of view in higher education, it highlights the gaps and suggests avenues for empirical studies in Pakistan and abroad through a rigorous research method.

1.6 Structure of the Paper

This review has been broken down into eight main sections. This introduction is followed by a description of the narrative review methodology and approaches in Section 2. In Section 3, conceptual foundations are provided by defining the three key constructs: students' leadership involvement, student volunteerism, and institutional commitment. In Section 4, the relationships between these constructs are explained using theoretical frameworks such as Astin's student involvement theory, Tinto's integration model, social exchange theory, organizational commitment theory, and civic engagement perspectives. Section 5 is a key synthesis of the literature, organised thematically around key relationships and contexts. Section 6 offers a conceptual framework to illustrate the potential multiple pathways through which leadership involvement and volunteerism could impact institutional commitment. The implications of various stakeholders in the Pakistani higher education are discussed in section 7. Future research directions are outlined in Section 8, limitations of the review discussed, and concluding remarks made.

2. NARRATIVE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This review uses a narrative (conceptual) review approach using systematic searching and critical appraisal of secondary literature. Narrative reviews differ from systematic reviews as they do not use a specific methodology or meta-analysis; instead, they aim to give a comprehensive overview of a topic by synthesizing a variety of literature sources, patterns, and themes, and developing conceptual understanding (Mohajan, 2018).

Search Strategy and Data Sources: A variety of academic databases were used to obtain literature, such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and SpringerLink. Various combinations of the search terms were used such as, "student leadership," "student involvement," "student volunteerism," "civic engagement," "institutional commitment," "student belonging," "student integration," "student engagement,"

"higher education," "student affairs," "campus activities," "co-curricular," and "Pakistan[i] higher education. In addition, the seminal works and foundational studies of key scholars (Astin, Tinto, Blau) were searched to ensure that the theoretical foundations were thoroughly covered. **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** Included literature: peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, and policy reports published primarily in the last 9 years (2017-2025) but fundamental theoretical papers that date back earlier were included. Empirical studies, literature reviews, and conceptual or theoretical papers that explored student engagement, leadership development, volunteerism, institutional commitment, belonging, retention, and integration in higher education were considered top priority. Studies from various geographical backgrounds were taken and included to give a global perspective, especially those related to or from South Asian and Pakistani backgrounds. Opinion pieces, grey literature that was not of scholarly quality, studies aimed exclusively at the K-12 education system, and literature related to organizational commitment in non-educational settings that did not easily transfer to students were excluded.

Analytical Approach: The review was structured around thematic bundles of concepts and relationships. Rather than being catalogued, literature was critically analysed and synthesised, with an emphasis on the identification of consistent patterns, theoretical coherence, contextual variations and gaps. Specific focus was given to the theoretical underpinning of proposed relationships, and the limitations in current evidence bases were identified.

Limitations: This is a narrative review, and as such does not use systematic PRISMA protocols, does not perform meta-analysis nor provide a quantified synthesis of findings across studies. The choice and weight of literature may be subjective to the author's judgement and may include some implicit biases of relevance and quality. Due to the lack of empirical studies specifically related to Pakistan, literature from other countries was used and attempted to be contextualized for Pakistan. Lastly, although the review is as comprehensive as possible, the literature base is growing and some relevant studies may not have been included.

3. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

3.1 Students' Leadership Involvement

Students' leadership involvement includes a wide range of leadership experiences and roles in which students are responsible, influence, and provide direction in institutional settings. These are formal roles like student council presidents and vice-presidents, class representatives, society or club officers and peer mentors (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). These include also less formally identified leadership experiences like being a member of student governing bodies, a leader of a debate society or an academic club, coordinating a team for community projects and being a campus ambassador for the institutional projects (Hero & Lindfors, 2019).

Unlike classroom learning, leadership in higher education requires the use of interpersonal influence, decision making in groups, problem-solving in ambiguity, managing multiple stakeholder interests, and taking responsibility for the results (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). As students take on leadership positions, they generally have greater opportunities to develop their communication skills, self-efficacy and self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision making, as well as to learn systems-thinking and to internalize a sense of responsibility for their own growth and that of their colleagues and institution (Hero & Lindfors, 2019).

The research evidence is clearly established that students in leadership positions report increased personal growth, higher self-esteem, greater confidence in their abilities, and increased commitment to further education than students who are not in leadership positions (Shortlidge et al., 2024). In addition, leadership involvement seems to support the development of identity as capable agentic persons who have a voice beyond the specific leadership role in institutional environments, which is an empowerment beyond the leadership role (Dost & Smith, 2023).

In the context of Pakistani higher education, student leadership comes in various forms, such as student unions, class representatives, departmental societies, and subject-matter clubs (debate, business, engineering societies, cultural societies, and ad hoc committees). However, the extent to which these opportunities are intentionally used to develop and engage students, the level of institutional support across institutions, and the extent to which students view their leadership roles as developmental and meaningful are poorly documented (Abbas et al., 2019).

3.2 Student Volunteerism

Volunteerism is defined as "unpaid, voluntary provision of time and effort for the benefit of others, communities or causes other than immediate self-interest" (Cnaan et al., 2021). In Higher Education settings, volunteerism can be defined as various forms of service such as participating in a blood donation camp, environmental conservation, disasters, teaching or tutoring disadvantaged youth, assisting with a community health campaign, assisting with a university event or function, participating in community service projects organized by university organizations, and involvement in advocacy initiatives on social issues (Chan et al., 2017).

Volunteering is different to employment-related service or as required in the curriculum, a community engagement, because it involves a choice to volunteer, no payment to the volunteer and often a motivation for the volunteer based on moral and social issues (Brunton et al., 2017). This is a voluntary commitment, often made without external rewards, which indicates that people have internalized values of social responsibility and have intrinsic motivation to contribute to the collective wellbeing (Piatak & Holt, 2019).

Student volunteerism has been found to increase civic awareness, improve empathy and perspective taking, build social connectedness with local communities as well as with the broader community, and develop critical consciousness, which involves awareness of systemic inequities and a desire to be part of the solution to achieve social justice (Heberle et al., 2020). Also, volunteering offers students an opportunity to put their classroom learning into practice in real life situations, see how they can make a difference in the lives of others, and acquire work-related skills that are needed in the workplace (García-Rico et al., 2021).

In the context of higher education in Pakistan, there are three types of student volunteering: formal volunteering through universities, community service programs conducted by student organizations, and informal peer-to-peer volunteering (Bhuttah et al., 2024). The extent to which volunteerism is emphasized along with the amount of resources dedicated to it can be different between institutions, which may also reflect general institutional values on civic responsibility and community involvement (Abbas et al., 2019).

3.3 Institutional Commitment

Student institutional commitment is defined as the level of positive psychological attachment, emotional identification, loyalty, and intentions to support and contribute to one's institution (Snijders et al., 2021). This construct includes affective dimensions (emotional attachment, pride in institutional affiliation), cognitive dimensions (perception of fit between own values and institutional values, identification with the institutional mission), and conative dimensions (willingness to invest in the institution, intention to stay affiliated with and support the institution) (Snijders et al., 2019).

Importantly, although the concept of organizational commitment has received much research attention in the field of work, students' institutional commitment varies significantly from the work context (Snijders et al., 2021). Students are not fundamentally driven to commit to a position by economic exchange (salary, benefits, career growth etc.) but by psychological, social, educational and identity factors. Moreover, student commitment exists within a prescribed time frame (enrollment time), but can also create patterns and identifications that last a lifetime. In addition, students' institutional commitment is more malleable than that of

employees and is influenced by their peers, academic experiences, and life circumstances (Picton et al., 2018).

Student institutional commitment has been measured and operationalized in different ways, such as self-reported affective attachment ("I feel a strong sense of belonging at my university"), normative commitment ("I feel morally obligated to support my institution"), behavioral intention to persist ("I plan to graduate from this institution"), willingness to advocate ("I would recommend my university to prospective students"), and actual behavioral contributions to institutional life through participation in campus activities, volunteer service, academic engagement, and prosocial behavior toward peers (Crawford et al., 2023).

The construct of institutional commitment is conceptually connected with but is different from a number of surrounding constructs. Student engagement is the degree of participation in educational and co-curricular activities that can play a supporting role, but does not necessarily equal institutional commitment, as defined by Prananto et al. (2025). Sense of belonging focuses on the psychological dimensions of belonging – the feeling of fitting in and being welcomed – which is an important but partial aspect of institutional commitment (Farrell et al., 2018). Academic satisfaction is related to experiences in the curriculum, while institutional commitment is related to the student's overall experience with the institution (Picton et al., 2018).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theoretical perspectives that offer explanatory foundations for the proposed relationships between leadership involvement, volunteerism and institutional commitment. This review does not test a single unified theory, but rather uses complementary theories to construct understanding.

4.1 Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin's student involvement theory is one of the most influential theories in the field of higher education research, and it suggests that students' learning and personal development are directly proportional to the amount and quality of physical and psychological energy a student puts into their educational experience (Connolly et al., 2017). This framework suggests that there are two dimensions of involvement: behavior (time spent on activities, participation in campus life) and psychology (attention, motivation, commitment) (Li & Xue, 2023).

The crux of involvement theory is that the more energy students put into campus-related activities, the more they grow attached to their peers and faculty, the more fully they are integrated into the institution, the more they adopt the institutions values, and the more they feel they belong to the institution (Connolly et al., 2017). The theory posits that student involvement in student organizations, leadership and volunteer activities results in measurable benefits for their personal growth, academic success and career success. In applied terms for the current review's focus, the theory of involvement implies that students who are involved in leadership and volunteer activities are putting in exactly the kind of psychological and physical investment that theory says will enhance their sense of belonging to and commitment to the institution (Li & Xue, 2023).

4.2 Tinto's Student Integration Model

Tinto's theory of student integration focuses on the extent to which students are both academically and socially integrated into school, which influences the likelihood of their remaining in school and persisting through college (Ward, 2017). Academic integration is the student's intellectual participation in the learning content and in the academic community, while social integration is the student's feeling of belonging to the social fabric of the institution and meaningful relationships with fellow students and members of the academic community (Lakhal et al., 2020).

According to Tinto's model, initial dispositions and characteristics (such as family background, previous educational background, and initial commitment) combine with institutional experiences to either further strengthen or weaken students' commitment and integration (Carmo Nicoletti, 2019). Positive academic interactions, feeling welcomed and valued in social contexts, feeling cared for by institutional members, and feeling aligned with the institutional values by their personal values increase commitment and increase likelihood of persistence (Zwolak et al., 2017).

Leadership and volunteerism can be effective tools to achieve academic and social integration. Students build relationships with other students that share intellectual interests, regularly meet with faculty and administrators, and have a voice in institutional decision making through leadership positions (Solanki et al., 2019). By volunteering, students develop social ties with other volunteers, feel the value of their participation and link personal values to institutional mission (Chan et al., 2017). Both experiences may support the integration processes that Tinto's theory predicts will lead to persistence and commitment (Wilton et al., 2019).

4.3 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, formulated in the field of social psychology and organizational behavior, suggests that relationships between people (or people and organizations) grow and endure as long as they perceive benefits are greater than costs (Rajâa & Mekkaoui, 2025). This model suggests that people continuously assess the reciprocity and fairness in their relationships: If they feel they are being recognized, supported, given opportunities, and treated with value in return for their contributions and commitment, they become more committed and invested in the relationship (Rawashdeh & Tamimi, 2019).

In the application of student-institution relationships, social exchange theory proposes that giving students meaningful leadership opportunities, supporting their volunteer activities, acknowledging their efforts, and demonstrating that the institution cares and invests in student development is considered as institutional support and caring (Ahmad et al., 2023). Reciprocal exchange is an exchange where students' emotional investment, organizational citizenship behaviors (helping peers, contributing to campus culture), and commitment to institutional goals (Rawashdeh & Tamimi, 2019) increase.

In the context of employment, perceived organizational support (POS) has been widely proven to be a good predictor of organizational commitment (Rajâa & Mekkaoui, 2025). Likewise, studies at the higher education level indicate that when students feel that their university/college values them, cares for their growth, and acknowledges their involvement, they show greater commitment to the institution (Snijders et al., 2021). Leadership involvement and volunteerism, as long as it is perceived by students as recognition and value of their contribution to the institution, can improve perceived organizational support and, therefore, increase institutional commitment (Snijders et al., 2019).

4.4 Organizational Commitment Theory

Although created to help understand commitment in the workplace, the organisational commitment theory has been adapted and applied to students' institutional commitment (Snijders et al., 2021). The most popular model recognizes three types of commitment: affective commitment (emotional attachment and identification with the organization), continuance commitment (perceived costs of leaving), and normative commitment (perceived obligation to stay) (Hameli & Ordun, 2022).

Of these dimensions, affective commitment is the most critical for predicting organizational behaviours, and the most relevant to understanding student institutional commitment (Solanki et al., 2019). Affective commitment arises when people feel good relationship with others, have a sense of support from the organization, feel valued, and have a congruence between personal

values and organizational values (Snijders et al., 2021). Leadership involvement and volunteerism seem to be experiences that foster exactly these conditions (Snijders et al., 2019). The key point to note when using organizational commitment theory with students is that student commitment is usually short-term, typically in relation to the duration of their enrolment, and that students are less likely to use the concepts of normative and continuance commitment than are permanent employees (Picton et al., 2018). However, the commitment of students is closer to that of temporary project team members or professional association members – affective and identity-based commitment over a specific period of time with a potential long-term effect on the loyalty of alumni and life-long association affiliation (Snijders et al., 2019).

4.5 Civic Engagement and Service-Learning Perspectives

Last, but not least, theory that focuses on civic involvement, social responsibility, and service-learning offer valuable frames for the study of the relationship between volunteerism and institutional commitment (Richard, 2017). The above views highlight that the role of higher education institutions goes beyond the mere pursuit of economic growth to also inculcate the qualities and responsibilities of engaged citizens and enhance capacities and commitments of students to tackle social issues (Coelho & Menezes, 2021).

Service-learning and civic engagement pedagogies assume that students learn more deeply and gain in moral development and civic awareness when they participate in meaningful service activities and engage in deliberate reflection (Chan et al., 2017). This view of student volunteering is not only a co-curricular activity, but a means of civic education that fosters a sense of justice, sense of power, and commitment to action in the community (Heberle et al., 2020).

These views imply that, through service, especially in conjunction with critical reflection on the service, students might gain not only institutional commitment but also civic and social commitment as well (Richard, 2017). It is not only a place to benefit personally but also a place where one can engage in meaningful experiences with real-world concerns and a community that is dedicated to social good, enhancing students' emotional and value-based attachment to the institution (Coelho & Menezes, 2021).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Student Leadership and Student Development

There is a substantial body of literature in higher education that has documented the connection between student leadership and personal development. Leadership experiences have been shown to consistently build students' communication skills, self-confidence and self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, interpersonal and collaborative skills, and perspective-taking and systems thinking skills (Eva et al., 2018). In addition, students in leadership positions report higher academic achievement, higher retention rates, and higher satisfaction with their school experiences than those who are not involved in leadership positions (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). An important way leadership achieves these outcomes is by fostering what the researchers call "authentic leadership"—leadership that is rooted in one's own personal values, that is communicated clearly and openly, that encourages ethical decision making, and that creates contexts in which people feel heard and valued (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). By cultivating these genuine attributes of leadership, student leaders demonstrate to their peers the connection between personal integrity and effective leadership, and foster a culture and climate that supports each other, encourages mutual trust and psychological safety, and promotes more pervasive positive peer influence and institutional climate (Bohari et al., 2024).

Leadership development research has also shown that the quality of the developmental experience depends on the quality of mentoring and support by faculty advisers, senior administrators and institutional systems (Eva et al., 2018). Leadership experiences yield more

powerful developmental outcomes when students are intentionally supported in their development, given clear expectations for their role, provided with feedback, given time to reflect on their growth, and recognized for their contribution (Kiersch & Peters, 2017).

At the institutional level, specifically, leadership experiences seem to enhance students' sense of agency and voice within the institution—the experience of having one's perspective valued and being able to influence institutional decisions (Picton et al., 2018). Theoretically, this sense of voice and agency are expected to increase students' psychological ownership of the institution, their identification with the mission and values of the institution, and their desire to contribute to the achievement of the institution's goals (Dost & Smith, 2023).

5.2 Volunteerism and Student Engagement

There is evidence that student volunteering has significant positive impacts on a variety of aspects of student development and engagement. The students who participate in volunteering activities have benefited from better social responsibility, increased empathy and the ability to put themselves in the shoes of others, improved awareness of social issues and inequities, improved sense of belonging to society and community, and increased moral development (Cnaan et al., 2021). In addition, volunteers exhibit greater civic involvement both in college and after graduation (Richard, 2017).

One important thing that has been found in the literature is that during volunteering, youth learn to have "critical consciousness," which means they gain awareness of systemic injustices and oppression, as well as efficacy to do something about it and commitment to collective action (Heberle et al., 2020). Volunteering, especially in settings where they personally feel the effects of social inequities and are supported to critically examine systemic causes, cultivates more than charitable dispositions, but also political awareness and a desire for change at a systemic level (Diemer et al., 2020).

The literature also shows that the quality and purpose of the volunteering experience can have a significant impact on developmental outcomes (Brunton et al., 2017). Structured and meaningful volunteer experiences that provide opportunities for reflection on the work and its meaning, institutional support and resources, and links to academic study or career interests have more developmental impacts than ad hoc or casual volunteer experiences (García-Rico et al., 2021).

Importantly, research has also uncovered potential dangers and limitations of some types of volunteerism. Helping with a hierarchical and patronising attitude toward passive recipients may be a more common form of 'charity-based' volunteering, which can end up strengthening hierarchical and patronising attitudes, rather than building relationships of solidarity and mutual respect (Grain, 2017). In addition, if the volunteer work is not voluntary and is not aligned to students' values or if it is not integrated with students' values, it may lead to compliance rather than commitment and lead to loss of intrinsic motivation (Chan et al., 2017).

5.3 Student Engagement and Institutional Commitment

The interconnection between student engagement and institutional commitment has been well documented in the research literature, but is conceptually different. Highly engaged students tend to have increased sense of belonging, have deeper relationships with peers and faculty, internalized institutional values, and increased emotional attachment to their institutions (Prananto et al., 2025). Engagement is a process that helps students know their school, feel part of the values and culture of their school, and feel part of the school communities (Li & Xue, 2023).

In addition, there seems to be a reinforcing relationship between student engagement and the commitment of the institution. Students who become committed to the institution are motivated to put in more effort into campus activities and experiences, and vice versa, students that engage in meaningful campus experiences are motivated to become committed to the

institution (Denovan et al., 2019). This two-way dynamic implies that improving engagement through the quality of the programming and opportunities can lead to an increase in engagement and commitment (Buelow et al., 2018).

The literature also identifies important role of relationships in linking engagement to commitment. Meaningful relationships with peers who share students' values and interests are strongly associated with students' institutional commitment, as are relationships of care and mentorship with faculty and staff (Snijders et al., 2021). In particular, participation in leadership and volunteer activities allows these types of relationships to occur: students who are engaged in leadership are having frequent interactions with a variety of peers with shared institutional interests, and they are also likely to be interacting with faculty mentors and institutional staff (Solanki et al., 2019).

5.4 Leadership Involvement as a Potential Predictor of Institutional Commitment

Based on the theories and literature reviewed, there are multiple mechanisms by which student leadership involvement is likely to positively impact institutional commitment. Based on the theories and empirical literature reviewed, there are multiple mechanisms by which student leadership involvement is likely to positively influence institutional commitment. First, in the development of recognition and positive regard: when students take leadership positions, they are usually recognized by faculty, administrators and students for their service and contributions. This recognition is a form of institutional valuing of the individual, which leads to subsequent valuing of the institution by the individual, in accordance with social exchange theory (Snijders et al., 2019).

Second, by developing responsibility and ownership: at the institutional level, responsibility and ownership are fostered as students assume leadership positions which help to enhance the wellbeing and achievement of their institution. This ownership plus the power to shape institutional decisions results in the students' feeling of psychological ownership of the institution, feeling that the institution is "theirs," and that what they do is important to the institution's success. Theoretically, this ownership mentality is known to increase commitment (Ahmed et al., 2018).

Third, voice in decision-making: meaningfully involving students in institutional processes as leaders. When students are granted access to voice, when their voice is listened to and included in decisions that impact the institution, and when they feel their voice made a difference, it enhances their sense of agency and belonging (Dost & Smith, 2023). This voice is referred to in the literature as an important voice in psychological involvement in organizations (Chan et al., 2017).

Fourth: by peer influence and social integration; student leaders regularly meet with peers who are committed to the institution through their leadership activities who are also students who have dedicated their time and energy to the institution. These peer relationships foster social settings with high engagement and institutional commitment. Moreover, students' leaders can serve as role models for students, and leadership commitment can permeate peer culture, which can be called ripple effects (Zwolak et al., 2017).

Fifth, via identity formation: assuming a leadership role initiates processes of identity formation in which students take up the role of a leader or change-maker in their self-concept. This identity integration leads to a psychological drive to sustain the behaviors of the emergent identity, which in turn leads to sustained behaviors and commitment (Davis et al., 2019).

Finally, as students engage in leadership in service of institutional objectives and gain a deep understanding of the institutional mission, values and culture, they are more likely to feel connected to the institution and view institutional success as being personally meaningful (Farrell et al., 2018). Theoretically and empirically, this identity-based commitment is the

strongest determinant of continued organizational citizenship and support (Snijders et al., 2021).

5.5 Volunteerism as a Potential Predictor of Institutional Commitment

In the same way, several pathways can be identified that can lead to potential impacts on institutional commitment when students volunteer. The first is by engaging in meaningful service experience: When students volunteer in service to others or causes, and when they directly experience the meaningfulness of their service, they will develop emotional connection to the service mission. When this service is presented as a reflection of institutional values and mission, the emotional commitment to the service is linked to the emotional commitment to the institution (García-Rico et al., 2021).

Second, social bonds are established through meaningfully shared service: students who serve together in meaningful service build social bonds and a sense of community. Social ties with fellow service and institutional mission participants add to institutional belonging and commitment (Brunton et al., 2017).

Third, through moral development and civic commitment: as reviewed above, volunteerism facilitates development of moral reasoning and civic consciousness. If these developmental processes take place in an institutional setting and are linked to institutional mission, then it is likely that the institutionalization of the student's moral identity and civic commitments will remain (Heberle et al., 2020).

Fourth, by institutional pride: students who volunteer for their institution, both for outside communities and for other students, can gain institutional pride as an agent of positive change in the world. This pride contributes to emotional attachment and commitment because one feels that their institution is making a difference to society's wellbeing (Coelho & Menezes, 2021).

Fifth, by aligning personal and institutional values: Volunteering offers students an opportunity to gain experiential knowledge of the extent of alignment between personal and institutional values. A perception of the institution's commitment to social responsibility, justice, community engagement and student development further bolsters the perception of fit and value-based commitment (Perello-Marin et al., 2018).

5.6 Pakistani Higher Education Context: Relevance, Opportunities, and Challenges

The conceptual and theoretical arguments presented are relevant to the Pakistani higher education institutions that are beset with a number of related challenges and opportunities. Pakistan's higher education system has around 1.8 million students enrolled in public and private universities, but it has been plagued by a series of issues such as poor completion rates, poor employment linkages, under-developed institutional culture of engagement, and concerns regarding graduate readiness for complex professional and civic roles (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

The Higher Education Commission's strategic agendas, which have been expressed in various Strategic Plans and quality assurance systems, have been increasingly focused on student-centered learning, graduate employability, research linkages and institutional accountability for social development (Abbas et al., 2019). In this context, student leadership development and volunteerism are becoming significant approaches to support these priorities (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

At present, student leadership is available in most of the Pakistani universities through student unions, class representative system, departmental student societies, religious societies, subject-matter clubs, and cultural clubs, etc. (Bhuttah et al., 2024). But there are some barriers to the impact and reach of these opportunities. First, leadership selection processes can be biased towards political, social or representation of certain student groups, which can lead to restricting leadership opportunities for larger groups of students and to limiting the quality of leadership development opportunities. Firstly, leadership selection processes can be biased towards political, social or representation of certain student groups, which can lead to limiting

the quality of leadership development opportunities and restricting leadership opportunities for wider groups of students (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

Second, the level of faculty and administrative support for student leaders is not uniform, with some institutions offering intentional mentoring and developmental support, and others providing little support (Abbas et al., 2019). This variation can impact the effectiveness of leadership experiences in terms of positive developmental outcomes and whether student leaders become genuinely committed or simply fill a role without taking any meaningful action within the institution (Heilporn et al., 2021).

Third, the institutional focus on leadership development in formal curriculum and professional development is still weak, with a majority of leadership learning taking place informally through experience, and not from formal leadership development programs (Bhuttah et al., 2024). Experiential learning is valuable, but when supplemented with careful reflection and developmental assistance, yields better results (Kiersch & Peters, 2017).

Fourth, the nature of volunteer opportunities is often ad hoc and disconnected from institutional mission and strategic priorities, and are not integrated systematically into institutional culture and programming, as opposed to being targeted (Bhuttah et al., 2024). This reduces the amount of institutional investment in volunteer infrastructure, coordination, recognition and reflection, which can limit the developmental and transformative potential of volunteer work (García-Rico et al., 2021).

Fifth, leadership opportunities for women students are not equal, as cultural and institutional barriers are still prevailing in the field of science and engineering (Bhuttah et al., 2024). It's a case of justice and a missed opportunity for institutional benefit, as women leaders offer a range of perspectives and strengths (Heilporn et al., 2021).

Sixth, there are many students in Pakistan who are also unable to take part in co-curricular activities, as they have limited time for such activities since they are involved in income generation and family responsibilities (Bhuttah et al., 2024). More widespread participation may be possible through institutional support systems (e.g. meal provision, transportation, and/or small stipends) but these are not common (Brunton et al., 2017).

Even with these obstacles, Pakistan's HEIs have significant untapped potential to tap into the leadership and volunteerism of students to build institutional commitment and develop students. The size and scale of student enrollments are a critical resource to address social issues and fulfill missions of institutions. As soft skills, such as leadership and civic responsibility, become more important for the success of students in the workplace and in their future professional careers, the institutions have an incentive to build these skills. Higher education is increasingly expanding access to previously underrepresented groups, affording opportunities to develop new generations of dedicated student leaders and active citizens (Bhuttah et al., 2024).

5.7 Gaps in Existing Literature

Although there is a significant body of literature on student engagement, leadership development, volunteerism and institutional commitment, there are still key gaps to address, and especially in this context. First, there is little empirical research directly exploring the relationship between leadership involvement, volunteerism and institutional commitment, especially with rigorous quantitative or mixed methods research designs that might reveal predictive strengths and mechanisms (Snijders et al., 2021).

Second, there was minimal empirical research published that specifically focuses on these relationships in the context of higher education in Pakistan (Bhuttah et al., 2024). The body of knowledge on the perception of leadership and volunteer experiences among Pakistani students, experiences that can be either supportive or challenging, and the impact of these experiences on the students' institutional commitment is still very little. This is a significant gap as many of

the global findings may not be directly applicable in the Pakistani context due to variations in cultural norms in relation to participation, institutional structures, patterns of student diversity, and socioeconomic status which influences students' ability to engage (Abbas et al., 2019).

Third, there is a lack of literature that has analyzed gender-sensitive leadership development and volunteer opportunities, especially in settings where gender role expectations and structural constraints limit women's participation (Bhuttah et al., 2024). To create equitable and inclusive programming, it is important to understand how gender influences access to and impacts on leadership and volunteer experiences (Heilporn et al., 2021).

Fourth, a limited number of studies have investigated how leadership and volunteerism in higher education affects institutional commitment during the student experience, as well as subsequent alumni commitment, civic engagement, and engagement in one's career (Snijders et al., 2019). Knowing about these long-term impacts would improve the argument for institutional investment in these programs (Richard, 2017).

Fifth, comparative research across Pakistan and other South Asian contexts, in the form of public versus private, urban versus provincial, and large versus small would shed light on how the relationship between engagement and commitment is influenced by institutional contexts (Bhuttah et al., 2024). Variation research might help to identify what institutional conditions support strong relationships and what institutional structures and cultures inhibit relationships (Heilporn et al., 2021).

Sixth, although some studies explore the impact of service-learning on student outcomes, few studies directly explore the impact of service-learning programs on institutional commitment itself, and this has not been explored extensively in the context of Pakistan (Chan et al., 2017). Last but not least, there is little qualitative research that has examined how students make sense of their own experiences of leadership and volunteering, what they value in participation, what they think the institution values in their participation and how this affects their commitment to the institution (Brunton et al., 2017).

6. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical views and literature reviewed above form the basis for this section, which proposes an integrated conceptual framework of how students' leadership involvement and volunteerism could impact institutional commitment in various direct and indirect ways. The framework is described in textual form to enable it to be developed as a testable model for future empirical research.

Direct Pathways. Institutional commitment can be directly shaped by leadership involvement and volunteerism in ways of recognition, voice and institutional identification. Institutional commitment grows when students participate in these activities and are acknowledged for their participation; when their voices are heard in the decision-making process at the institution; and when they internalize the institution's values and mission (Snijders et al., 2019). These direct pathways are based on social exchange theory (reciprocal commitment when one contributes) and identity-based commitment (when institutional identity becomes part of one's self-concept) (Snijders et al., 2021).

Indirect Pathways—Student Engagement and Belongingness. Leadership involvement and volunteerism promote student engagement in a general sense – student participation in academic and co-curricular activities, student interaction with peers and faculty, and student use of physical and psychological energy in the institution. In turn, this engagement leads to the enhancement of sense of belonging and social integration, which, theoretically and empirically, is known to influence institutional commitment (Prananto et al., 2025). That is, leadership and volunteer experiences can provide students with access to a wider range of engagement experiences, and in this expanded engagement, students' sense of belonging and commitment are strengthened (Li & Xue, 2023).

Indirect Pathways: Social integration and relationships. Leadership involvement and volunteerism establishes the environment for the development of meaningful peer relationships, which are defined as relationships with other students who are committed to their involvement in the institution and the development of social responsibility. These relationships offer social support, help to establish the values of the institutions, and contribute to social integration (Solanki et al., 2019). Social integration, in turn, has long been known to predict institutional commitment and retention (Tinto, 2017).

Indirect Pathways through Institutional Identification. When students participate in leadership and volunteer opportunities related to their institution's mission and values, they become more attached to their institution, viewing it as a place that not only provides an educational service but also is a community of people involved in meaningful work, committed to values that students support (Coelho & Menezes, 2021). Theoretically speaking, this institutional identification is the foundation of affective commitment (Snijders et al., 2021).

Indirect Pathways through Development of Civic Consciousness and Moral Identity. Students gain civic consciousness and civic and moral identities, especially via volunteering, and also via leadership for social causes. The connection of these identity and value developments to institutional contexts and institutional mission produce long-lasting associations between the institution and the student's core identity and moral commitments (Heberle et al., 2020).

6.1 Conceptual Framework

This review suggests a conceptual model to help understand the relationship between students' leadership experience and their commitment to the institution through volunteering in higher education. The framework is based on the premise that participation of students in institutional and community-based activities can foster a sense of agency, belonging, identity and affective attachment to the institution.

First, students' leadership participation can contribute to institutional commitment via recognition, voice and participation in institutional processes. Where students are given opportunities to lead clubs and societies, student councils, peer support programmes or academic activities, they might have a greater sense of control and ownership. This can further reinforce their institutional commitment and enhance affective commitment.

Second, meaningful service experiences can meaningfully shape institutional commitment via student volunteerism. By engaging in volunteer work, students gain opportunities to discover social contribution, civic responsibility and personal significance. In the situation where these experiences are congruent with institutional values and mission, students might feel a deeper moral attachment to the institution, leading to increased institutional identification and commitment.

Third, the involvement of leaders and volunteers can work together to support institutional commitment by involving more students. These two modes of participation can foster social integration, positive peer relationships and a sense of belonging. These can be significant channels of emotional attachment, loyalty and willingness to support their institution.

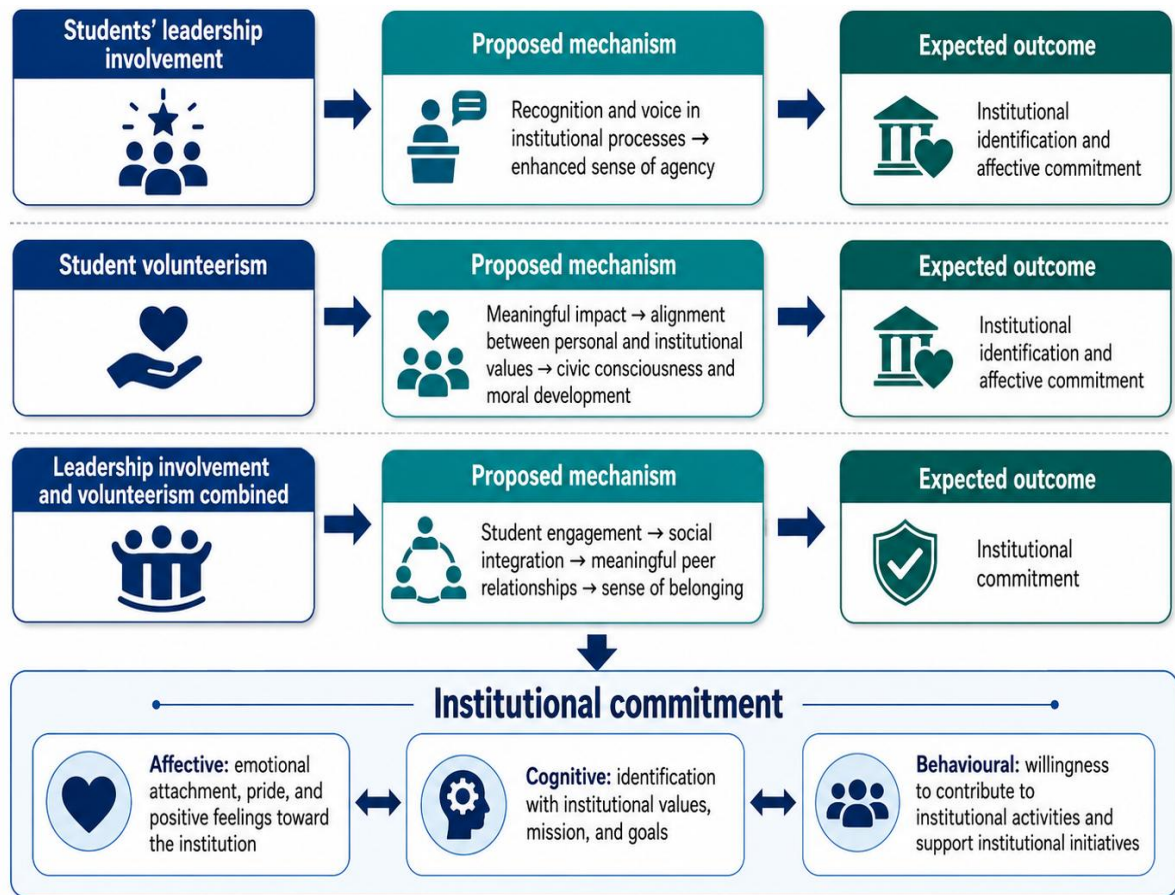


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

In this conceptualization, institutional commitment is defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon having affective, cognitive and behavioral components. The affective aspect is the students' emotional bonding, pride and positive attitude in relation to their school. The cognitive dimension is related to students' identification with institutional values, mission and goals. The behavioural dimension is manifested in the students' willingness to participate in the activities of the institution, to support the initiatives of the institution and to maintain a positive relationship with the institution.

6.2 Moderating and Enabling Factors

There are a number of institutional and individual factors that could affect the strength of the relationships suggested within this framework. These include the quality of mentoring and developmental support offered by faculty and administrators, the institutional culture that values leadership development and social responsibility and the access to resources for leadership and volunteer programmes. Student input and contributions may also be linked to participation and commitment through recognition and celebration.

Enabling factors include a clear connection between leadership/volunteer experiences and the institution's mission; students' motivation to participate; quality of peer relationships related to leadership and volunteer activities; clarity of role expectations; and students' perception of the meaningfulness of their roles. Demographic and background characteristics (including previous educational experiences, first-generation student status, socioeconomic status, gender, and institutional opportunities) might also influence the nature of students' leadership, volunteerism, and institutional belonging experiences.

The conceptual framework is offered as a starting point for further empirical research, but is not an established model. Future research can be conducted to explore the strength of the proposed pathways, investigate any possible mediating and moderating variables, and explore if there are differences in these relationships across institutional types such as public and private higher education institutions of Pakistan.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION

The above review and framework have several implications to different stakeholder groups in the context of Pakistani higher education. Implications for each stakeholder group presented, with an awareness of interconnections between implications for different groups.

7.1 Implications for University Administration and Leadership

Student leadership development should be a commitment and investment in the institution by the university administration and governing bodies. This means that institutional policies, structures and resource allocations are explicit in supporting student leadership opportunities. In particular, universities should implement formal and transparent student governance structures that have real decision-making power, develop leadership development structures across the class; provide dedicated student society and club funding; and regularly review and improve leadership programs based on student feedback. It is also important for universities to create mentoring opportunities for student leaders and senior administrators to share values and how the student's contributions support the institutional mission. In addition, civic responsibility and engagement should be demonstrated by institutional leaders, communicating to students that civic engagement and volunteering are important institutional activities.

7.2 Implications for Student Affairs and Co-Curricular Programming

Student affairs divisions should think of volunteer and leadership programs as not an "add-on" or "extra," but as integral to student development and institutional commitment. It needs deliberate staffing, staff training for advisers and embedding of co-curricular activities in academic mission. Student affairs offices need to implement a holistic volunteer coordination model, implement a series of leadership development models, create peer mentoring and ambassador programs, and have a clear system for acknowledging and celebrating student efforts. Importantly, student affairs professionals need to collaborate with academic departments to emphasize the relationship between student engagement and learning outcomes, reinforcing the involvement of students with learning and institutional values.

7.3 Implications for Faculty Advisers and Academic Advisors

The faculty advisers of student societies and clubs provide a crucial link between the curricular and co-curricular areas. Faculty members need to be supported by professional development to effectively facilitate student organizations, to link leadership development to academic content and career development, and to support inclusive decision making processes in student societies. Academic advisers should include co-curricular engagement in holistic student development conversations, assist students in thinking about opportunities for leadership and service within the context of their values and goals, and assist students in reflecting on how these experiences enrich their lives and contribute to their relationship with the institution.

7.4 Implications for Higher Education Policy and HEC-Level Planning

Policy-wise, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan can consider to make student engagement, leadership development and civic responsibility as a part of the institutional qualitative assurance and accreditation procedures. Examples of policy actions could be establishing national policies on student governance, incorporating civic involvement and service-learning into institutional strategic plans, mandating institutions to share student engagement and volunteer participation indicators, and providing research and capacity-building resources for student affairs practice. Further, HEC could support innovation in student leadership and volunteer programming, specifically in provincial and underserved

institutions, by creating a system of networks for the study and exchange of ideas around student engagement and leadership development, and by offering grant opportunities for innovation in student leadership and volunteer programming.

7.5 Implications for Students Themselves

Students should see leadership roles and volunteerism as more than resume-enhancing activities or time-fillers, but as opportunities for personal growth, civic engagement and institutional affiliation. Students involved with leadership need to be deliberate about their roles, and look at the impact of their leadership in relation to institutional objectives and community service. Likewise, students thinking about volunteering should think about relationships to broader institutional missions and community needs, beyond transactional service, and to sustained, reflective civic engagement.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

There are a number of important limitations to this narrative review that should be noted. It is a conceptual and narrative review, and does not use the structured search protocols, formal quality appraisal processes, or meta-analytic synthesis methods that are typical of systematic reviews. So it cannot claim to exhaustively catalogue all relevant literature, or to make a statistical synthesis of the effects sizes found across studies. Second, the review is limited by the available empirical studies, which have relatively few studies dedicated to the study of the relationship between student leadership participation, volunteering, and institutional commitment, especially in the Pakistani higher education context. The majority of the literature discussed deals only with the individual constructs and not with the interrelationships. Third, although the review includes literature from higher education which has relevance to the Pakistani context, empirical research specifically commissioned in the Pakistani context is limited, and generalizations from the international literature to the Pakistani context need to be qualified because of key contextual differences in institutional configuration, student demographics, governance systems and cultural contexts. Fourth, the review does not consider the potential negative outcomes of leadership involvement (e.g., burnout, stress, and negative peer dynamics), differences in student experiences by gender and socioeconomic status, discipline, or institution type, as well as differences in motivations and outcomes of leadership and volunteer work. Lastly, the proposed conceptual framework is based on a theoretical foundation, but has not yet been tested empirically and is a preliminary synthesis, not a tested model.

9. CONCLUSION

Students' leadership and voluntary activities have been discussed conceptually and theoretically as the important concepts that can predict higher education commitment amongst students with special focus on the context of Pakistan. The review has synthesized literature from multiple areas of student development theory, organizational behavior, civic engagement scholarship, and higher education studies to develop an integrated argument: that meaningful student involvement in leadership positions and volunteer work can enhance students' commitment to their institutions in several psychological, social, and development pathways such as increased belongingness, increased institutional identification, enhanced social integration, recognition and validation, and increased sense of personal responsibility for the success of their institutions.

These relationships are supported with compelling conceptual support from the theoretical frameworks derived from the work of Astin's Student Involvement Theory, Tinto's Student Integration Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and civic engagement perspectives. The literature on student leadership development shows that when students are involved in leadership, there is an indication that they become more responsible, effective communicators, team players, self-confident and more committed to their institutions. Likewise, research on student

volunteering and service-learning suggests a connection between volunteering, empathy, civic responsibility, social connectedness, and meaningful institutional participation, all of which are theoretically related to commitment and belonging.

These connections are incredibly important in the Pakistani higher education system. In a climate of increasing focus on improving the quality of education, employability of graduates, civic engagement, and institutional distinctiveness in Pakistani universities, student engagement becomes an important institutional development tool. However, there are challenges in creating a comprehensive, inclusive leadership and volunteer opportunities in many Pakistani institutions and relatively little empirical work to investigate the impact of such experiences on institutional commitment among Pakistani students. The suggested conceptual plan provides a theoretic basis for further empirical studies within this context.

To the university administration, student affairs professionals, faculty advisers, and student affairs and institutional policy makers at the university, the message is clear: intentional investments in structured student leadership and developmentally focused volunteerism is not just an amenity, but a strategic approach to building student commitment, improving the quality of the university, and producing civic-minded graduates that Pakistan's society demands. Empirical studies (both quantitative and qualitative) testing proposed institutional pathways, mixed-methods studies that explore the experiences of students, comparative analyses of institutional types, gender-sensitive analyses of access and outcomes, and longitudinal studies that track how involvement shapes commitment over time will be critical to further develop theory and inform institutional practice.

Student engagement and institutional commitment are areas of research and practice that are yet to be explored and are theoretically promising in Pakistani higher education system. Pakistani universities, based on the concepts that have emerged from this review and the empirical research pathways suggested, can devise concepts and approaches to enhance the relationship between students and universities and promote their educational goals based on evidence and theory.

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