

ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF COMMUNITY SERVICE COURSES IN PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of community service programs in Pakistani universities, focusing on student engagement, skill development, and societal impact. The research aims to explore how such programs contribute to students' personal growth, civic responsibility, and practical learning. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The sample consisted of 200 students selected from six universities in Lahore—three public and three private institutions. The findings indicate that community service programs have a positive impact on students' sense of responsibility, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. However, the effectiveness varied between public and private universities due to differences in program implementation and institutional support. The study recommends strengthening institutional frameworks, providing proper training, and integrating community service into academic curricula to enhance outcomes. These results are valuable for policymakers, university administrators, and educators in developing more impactful community engagement initiatives in higher education.

Keywords: Community service, Higher education, Civic responsibility

Introduction

Community service programs—also referred to as service-learning or civic engagement courses—have emerged as a key pedagogical strategy in higher education worldwide. By pursuing these goals, these initiatives aim to encompass a structured form of community-oriented service within academic curricula, contributing to the civic growth of students and the welfare of societies (Jacoby, 2015). Universities in Pakistan have started to consider such models as a response to the growing social problems in the country: poverty, illiteracy, health deficit, and disengagement of the youth—they see community service as a means of instilling a sense of civic responsibility in the students (Aslam, Jaffery, & Zaidi, 2011; Kosar, Said, & Habil, 2023). But there is limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these programs, especially when comparing institutional types. The current study addresses that gap by evaluating the community service program in six major university campuses in Lahore, three public and three private, based on the outcomes in terms of student involvement, personal and career development, and community benefit. In developed societies like the United States, service learning has proved to be an effective tool in developing the civic responsibility as well as practical problem solving and long term civic engagement in students (Astin & Sax, 1998; Marcus, Howard, & King, 1993 cited in Aslam et al., 2011).

Similarly, the guided engagement in community service has been cited by the research to empower civic reflection and awareness among the students in Pakistani contexts (Aslam et

al., 2011; Morrison, 2016). Changes in self rated levels of civic awareness, community attachment, and communication skills of Pakistani female social science students following a service learning module incorporated into a health center were published by Aslam and colleagues and found to be statistically significant (Aslam et al., 2011). In addition, alumni studies carried out in Hong Kong indicate that compulsory units on civic participation can result in the possibility of volunteerism two years after graduation (Shek et al., 2025). Overall, these findings point to the potential of academic service programs to promote long-term civic involvement. The Pakistani universities do not have full institutionalization of community service despite the positive evidence. Although, there exist national initiatives of encouraging community oriented learning such as the Quality Enhancement Cells initiated by the Higher Education Commission, integration of service learning has not been enthusiastically adopted in a coordinated way (Kosar et al., 2023).

In a commentary on the absence of real world, curriculum embedded service experiences in medical and social science curriculums, Aslam et al. (2011), remarked that medical and social science students required experiences of real world service to enhance understanding of the needs, problems and opportunities of the underserved population. Similarly, Morrison (2016) discovered a tragic mismatch between what students want to be doing in sensible service and the infrequent, frequently under-resourced programming offered in colleges. The obstacles include ineffective institutional frameworks, minimal faculty improvement on the subject of service pedagogy, and deficiency in reflection infrastructure (Kosar et al., 2023; Shek et al., 2025). The relative research between the public and the private-sector universities is thus elemental in identifying program execution systemic facilitators and inhibitors.

There are six major universities in Lahore which are going to be discussed in this paper: University of the Punjab, Government College University, and University of education (public); and Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore School of Economics, and Forman Christian College (private). The selection of these institutions is given consideration to the fact that they represent variants of governance, resource capacities, and civic engagement orientation. The city of Lahore is home to a variety of established voluntary programmes (e.g., the MOVE programme and Deaf Reach, Family Educational Services Foundation) and now, student led community organisations in LUMS and GCU (FESF, 2024). Seeger et al. (2016) claimed, though, that systematic comparative studies that examine program structure, student outcomes, and community impact are still lacking.

Problem Statement

Community service programs have been recognized in recent years as important elements of higher education, intended to instill in students a sense of civic duty, practical expertise, and social conscience. Although the programs have been established well and examined extensively in most developed nations, little is known about how these programs are run and their effects specifically in Pakistan, and more specifically in universities. Despite the fact that a number of Lahore universities both governmental and private have incorporated an element of community service, empirical evidence evaluating its success, design and output is lacking.

Moreover, there can be inequity between the public and non-public institutions regarding the distribution of resources, programs, students enrollment and institutional assistance. In the absence of a thorough knowledge of the operation and impact of these programs on student growth, universities could end up not meeting their desired educational and social objectives. It is this knowledge gap that restricts the potential of community service as a meaningful contribution to the development of the students as well as the community. Hence, it is urgent to conduct the research comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of community service

programs in Lahore public and private universities. This paper will focus on filling this gap by evaluating the program design, level of student participation, and the effects of these programs on students and neighborhoods. The results will be used to inform policy and program changes to improve civic learning and institutional responsibility in higher education in Pakistan.

Research Aims

This study pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. To catalogue and compare the structure and resource support of community service programs—including curricular embedding, hour requirements, reflection activities, faculty mentorship, and partner engagement—across public and private universities in Lahore.
2. To assess program outcomes on student development, specifically civic awareness, teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and sustained community engagement.
3. To evaluate community impact, considering partner satisfaction, service sustainability, and scope of outreach of community stakeholders.

Research Questions

- How are community service programs structured and implemented in public and private universities of Lahore?
- What is the impact of community service participation on students' personal, social, and professional skill development?
- Are there significant differences in the effectiveness of community service programs between public and private universities?
 - How do students perceive the value and relevance of their community service experiences?

What challenges do universities face in organizing and sustaining community service programs?

What are the perceived impacts of these programs on the local communities served?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Service-Learning

Service learning is a specific type of experiential education, which offers a guided combination of service to the community and academic studying (Ferrari & Chapman, 2014). It is characterized by this twofold goal, which is why it is distinguished among internships and volunteerism since it is a direct connection of practical service with the curriculum and reflective practice (Furco, 1996 as cited in Salam et al., 2019). Its theoretical foundation goes back to the experiential learning cycle developed by Dewey, which involves a concrete experience, a reflective observation, an abstract conceptualization, and experimental action (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Bringle & Clayton, 2012).

According to Bringle and Clayton (2012), this circular motion develops civic identity, critical thinking, as well as social responsibility. In line with this, a systematic review conducted by Salam et al. (2019) pointed out that these experiential and reflective elements are often featured in service learning frameworks, which allows them to be academically rigorous, in addition to aiding community-related activities. Though not particular to Pakistan, the Talloires Declaration does offer an international point of reference wherein institutions of higher learning are encouraged to institutionalize civic engagement in the form of teaching, research and service (Talloires Network, 2005). This is a global statement which provides a normative framework to promote social responsibility and civic mission at the institutional culture of universities (Talloires Network, 2005).

Implementation of Service-Learning in Pakistan

Service learning has slowly picked up the attention within the Pakistani higher education scenario. There are efforts, but they are yet to be institutionalized (Habib, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2021). A qualitative research study on service learning in vocational teacher education programmes observed structural barriers of lack of curriculum integration, training of faculty, and assessment system (Ahmad, Khan, & Saeed, 2021).

The present results confirm remarks made by Habib (2021) that service learning in Pakistan is met with opposition on the basis of a preference of theoretical instruction and lack of resources when it comes to experiential learning. Sector specific implementations are found in the empirical studies. A survey, using mixed methods, of vocational students in Punjab concluded that service learning produced a greater impact on mastery of course material than did teamwork or interpersonal skills and that the impacts varied by gender (Deeba, 2023). This highlights the need of subtle; discipline specific program design. On the same note, an Asia-Pacific systematic review by Salam et al. (2019) has emphasised common uses in teacher education, healthcare, and business-related fields, which can offer comparative ideas in Pakistani settings. Service learning also touches on national sustainability efforts. A MDPI environmental sustainability review reminds about the role of higher education in sustainable development and civil liability which service learning is quite capable of handling (Sustainability in HEIs in Pakistan, 2023). Although the study emphasizes environmental education, on the whole, it requires further embedding of community service in the curricula the call that is perfectly consistent with the principles of service learning.

Outcomes and Challenges of Service-Learning in Pakistan

Student Learning and Employability Outcomes

The research in the Pakistani context and other similar settings identifies a number of advantages. Vocational training In Deeba (2023) survey of vocational training, service learning was found to reinforce academic knowledge but exert a neutral impact on teamwork and communication. Conversely, Gul, Ahmad, and Tufail (2023) showed that service learning programs aimed at the development of so-called citizen leaders improve leadership, problem solving, public speaking, and interpersonal skills, which are outcomes shown to be of importance to employability and civil engagement. Such findings are also reinforced by a global view. Common benefits of participation in systematic literature review are described in the global study by Salam et al. (2019): academic knowledge application, civic awareness, personal growth, and professional skills development. Moreover, the wider systematic review of service learning (ResearchGate, 2024) highlighted its flexibility in terms of its application to various disciplines, including health sciences, business, and education, which can provide Pakistan higher education system with transferable results.

Institutional and Faculty Challenges

In Pakistan, although the idea of service learning promises, there are still some impediments. According to Ahmad, Khan, and Saeed (2021), there were strong obstacles at the institutional level: the lack of faculty development, incentives, and adequate evaluation processes, the poor connection with the community. The results of this study resonate with international concerns raised by Butin (2006), who cautions that unless service learning is well institutionalised and provides the reflection chances, it will be a mere veneer. The sustainability review also describes systemic obstacles in the way of resources, quality assurance, and absence of strategy integration with curricular planning (Sustainability in HEIs in Pakistan, 2023). A combination of these aspects makes it clear that the support at the policy level is required, such as faculty preparation, models of funding, and evaluation that would acknowledge the civic pedagogy as important as the traditional academic indicators.

Community and Social Impact

Although service learning is usually showing beneficial effects on students, community partners in Pakistan are starting to show effects of service learning. The ability of service learning to develop capacity in local communities is demonstrated by Salam et al. (2019) and the literature (e.g. Andal & others, 2020), but the outcomes usually depend on the maintained academic-community partnerships and effective partnership models. The Pakistani case studies are less numerous, yet correspond to those at the global level: the mutual benefit is strong only in the case of co-designed, sustained, and reflective projects (Trigos-Carrillo et al., 2020).

Gender, Culture, and Social Context

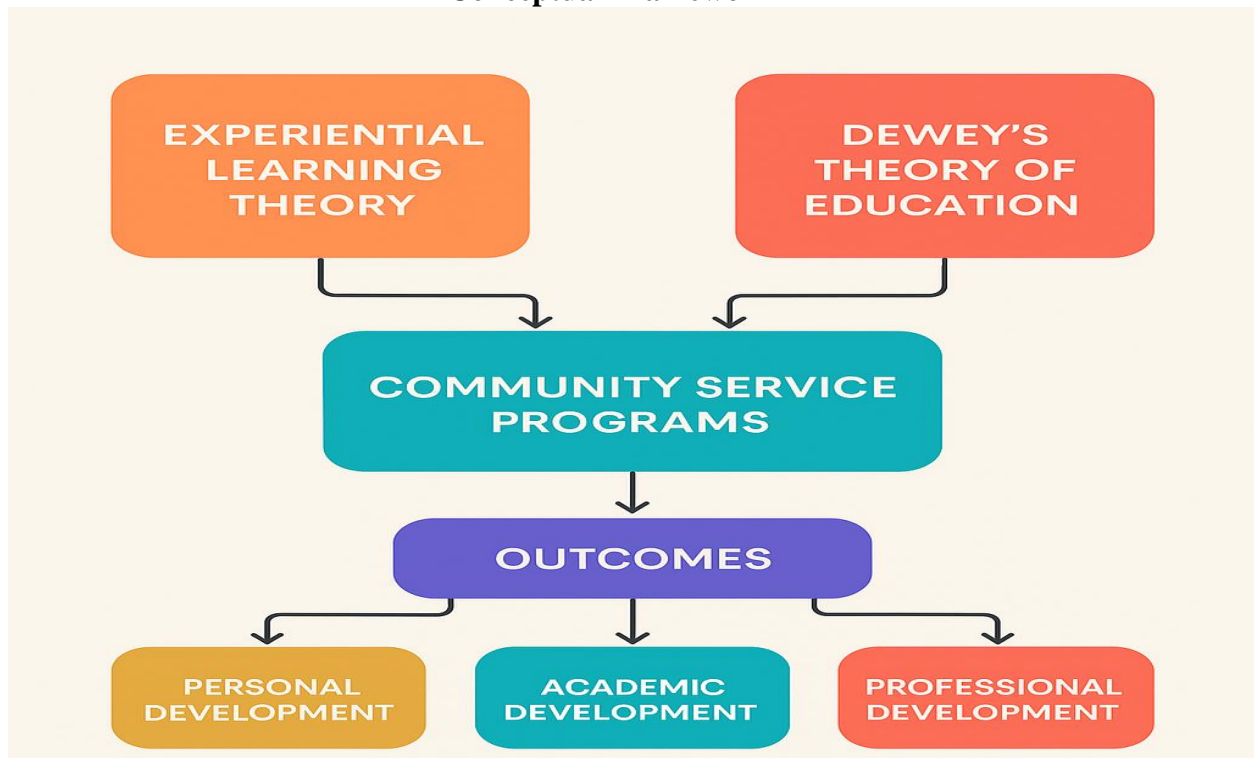
The social setting of Pakistan also influences the results of service learning. The cultural restrictions on women participation in society may tend to affect the program attendance and performance (Deeba, 2023). A vocational education context engendered a Pakistani culture that delivered different results based on gender, which is why it should be culturally responsive in its design (Deeba, 2023). Furthermore, institutional disparities including urban/rural differences, the language spoken, and the expectations of the faculty members influence the interpretation and perception of service, which necessitates the comprehensive pedagogical models. The literature on service learning has a clear theoretical background based on Dewey experiential learning and on international models such as the Talloires Declaration.

Pakistani studies affirm the academic and skill development results which are exclusively empirical in nature especially in vocational and teacher education settings. Nevertheless, the problems associated with institutional support, evaluation, faculty capability, and community sustainability are still extensive. This is crucial in effective gender and culture sensitive implementation. The present review indicates that Pakistani universities in Lahore and other cities have embarked on experimenting service learning but their success will be determined by their ability to synthesize curricular frameworks, enhance faculty growth and development, forge partnerships with the communities and overcome socio cultural constraints. Such results speak to the necessity of comparative, multi institutional research to guide policy and practice, which is exactly what your proposed study is intended to do.

Theoretical Framework

The figure of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) by David Kolb (1984) underlies this study: according to it, knowledge is generated in the course of the transformation of experience. Community service programs fit in the four stage learning cycle of Kolb namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. By actively involving students in the community service, students are able to have real life experiences which complements academic study and at the same time foster civic duty. Moreover, the theory of education and democracy presented by John Dewey supports the study as he accentuates the role of learning by doing and introduces the community involvement into the education process (Giles & Eyler, 1994). In the philosophy of Dewey the concept is strengthened that education must qualify people to active members of the democratic society by relating classroom knowledge to the needs of the society. Through the theories, the research evaluates the capacity in which community service contribute to the personal, academic and professional growth of the students. It is also able to assist in the assessment of the effectiveness of the Pakistani universities in utilizing the service programs in the development of social responsibility graduates.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to evaluate the effectiveness of community service programs in selected Pakistani universities. The focus was on collecting numerical data through structured instruments to ensure objectivity and generalizability of the findings. A descriptive survey method was adopted to gather data on students' perceptions and experiences regarding the impact of community service on their academic, personal, and professional development.

The population for this study included undergraduate students enrolled in community service or civic engagement programs across six universities in Lahore, Pakistan—three public and three private. A sample of 200 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation from each university type. Equal numbers of male and female students were included to reduce gender bias.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on existing literature and theoretical models, such as Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Dewey's Theory of Education. The questionnaire consisted of 30 close-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The items focused on the students' experiences, perceived learning outcomes, skill development, civic responsibility, and satisfaction with the community service programs.

The questionnaire was validated through expert review, and a pilot test was conducted with 20 students from universities not included in the main sample to ensure reliability. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency, with a value of 0.86 indicating a high level of reliability.

Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentages were used to summarize students' responses. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, were applied to determine any

significant differences in perceptions across public and private university students, as well as among different demographic groups such as gender and academic year. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection and analysis process. The results obtained from this quantitative methodology aimed to provide evidence-based insights into the value and shortcomings of community service programs in the Pakistani higher education context.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)
University Type	Public	100	50%
	Private	100	50%
Gender	Male	100	50%
	Female	100	50%
Academic Year	1st Year	50	25%
	2nd Year	50	25%
	3rd Year	50	25%
	4th Year	50	25%

The sample was designed as follows; a representation of equal number of students in public (50%) and private (50%) universities, equal gender (50% males, 50% females) and equal distribution across all four year of study (25% each). This demographic equilibrium permits making sure that the results of the studies will not be distorted by the excessive representation of one or several specific groups and that it will be possible to make fair comparisons both across the types of universities and academic levels. The stratified type of sampling will increase the ability to generalize findings throughout the population of under graduate students of Lahore involved in community service programs.

Table 2: Structure of Community Service Programs (Public vs. Private Universities)

Program Feature	Public Universities (Mean Score)	Private Universities (Mean Score)	p-value (t-test)
Curricular Integration	3.2	4.1	0.002*

Program Feature	Public Universities (Mean Score)	Private Universities (Mean Score)	p-value (t- test)
Mandatory Hour Requirements	3.5	3.8	0.120
Faculty Mentorship	2.9	3.7	0.010*
Reflection Activities	3.1	4.0	0.005*
Partner Engagement	3.0	3.9	0.008*

*(5-point Likert scale: 1 = Very Weak, 5 = Very Strong; $p < 0.05$ significant)

Interpretation The program structure of private universities is by far much better in terms of critical dimensions than that of the public institutions. The largest discrepancies are observed in curricular integration (4.1 vs. 3.2), faculty mentorship (3.7 vs. 2.9), and reflection activities (4.0 vs. 3.1), and the differences in all of them are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the private universities are more effective in integrating the community service with academic structures and have superior support systems. The insignificance of the only difference in the mandatory hours requirements (3.8 vs. 3.5) allows stating that both sectors demand equal time devotion, yet private institutions can manage these demands more efficiently, due to the better organization of their programs.

Table 3: *Perceived Impact on Student Development*

Skill/Outcome	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Civic Awareness	4.2	0.8
Teamwork	4.0	0.7
Communication Skills	3.9	0.9
Critical Thinking	3.7	0.8
Sustained Engagement	3.5	1.0

(5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

According to the students, the most effective growth is observed in the area of civic awareness (mean=4.2) and teamwork (mean=4.0), which allows stating that community service programs are effective in terms of developing social responsibility and ability to work in a team. But make fewer points in critical thinking (mean=3.7) and long-term involvement (mean=3.5) indicate that possibly programs are focusing on short-term service experience rather than long-term analytical reflection or long-term commitment. The pattern shows that programs are successful in their simple objectives of increasing the social consciousness but could do more in increasing high-order thinking skills and long-term civic engagement.

Table 4: *Comparison of Student Perceptions (Public vs. Private Universities)*

Outcome	Public (Mean)	Private (Mean)	p-value
Civic Awareness	3.9	4.5	0.001*
Teamwork	3.8	4.2	0.020*
Communication Skills	3.7	4.1	0.015*
Critical Thinking	3.5	3.9	0.040*
Sustained Engagement	3.2	3.8	0.005*

*(Independent samples t-test; $p < 0.05$ significant)

The students of the private universities repeatedly show a more positive response in all the dimensions that are measured by the students of the public universities. The largest values can be seen in the civic awareness (4.5 versus 3.9) and sustained engagement (3.8 versus 3.2) with all the differences being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). These findings can be consistent with those of Table 2 regarding the existence of superior program structures in the private institutions, wherein it can be implied that more well-designed programs that have more substantial faculty support and reflection elements in them have more significant outcomes in terms of student development. The similarity in the trend of all the measures highlights systemic variations between the two sectors in terms of program effectiveness.

Table 5: *Student Satisfaction with Program Components*

Component	Satisfied (%)	Neutral (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
Faculty Guidance	65%	20%	15%
Partner Organization Role	70%	15%	15%
Reflection Sessions	55%	25%	20%
Logistical Support	60%	25%	15%

The levels of satisfaction are different concerning all elements of the program, with the partner organization roles being the most approved (70 percent satisfied) and reflection sessions the least (55 percent satisfied). The 20 percent dissatisfaction level with the faculty guidance and reflection sessions point out to areas that require some improvements. It is interesting to note that logistical support is satisfying (60%), but a large number of neutral responses (25 percent) indicates that many students feel neutral about support structures in the institutions. The results indicate certain areas that the universities may improve the student experiences especially those relating to reinforcing the reflective practices and the faculty engagement.

Table 6: *Challenges Faced by Universities (Administrative Perspectives)*

Challenge	Public Universities (%)	Private Universities (%)
Lack of Funding	75%	40%
Student Motivation	50%	35%
Community Partner Reliability	60%	45%
Faculty Resistance	30%	20%
Logistical Constraints	55%	50%

The challenges are significantly higher in case of the public universities, especially when it comes to funding (75% vs. 40%) and the reliability of community partners (60% vs. 45%). The two industries are tied in the logistical limitations (55% vs. 50%), so it seems that infrastructure restrictions are an industry-agnostic issue. This could be the reason why the challenges reported in the private universities are lower in all the categories and thus the reason why they have a stronger program structure and outcomes as demonstrated in the earlier tables. Although faculty resistance is evident in both sectors (30 percent versus 20 percent), it seems to be less overwhelming than resource-related hindrances, which indicates that funding and partnerships should be regarded as the key obstacles to program quality.

Student Satisfaction with Program Components

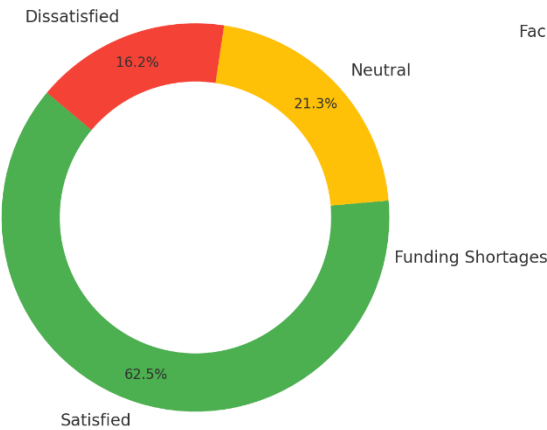


Figure 1

Challenges Faced by Universities (Public)

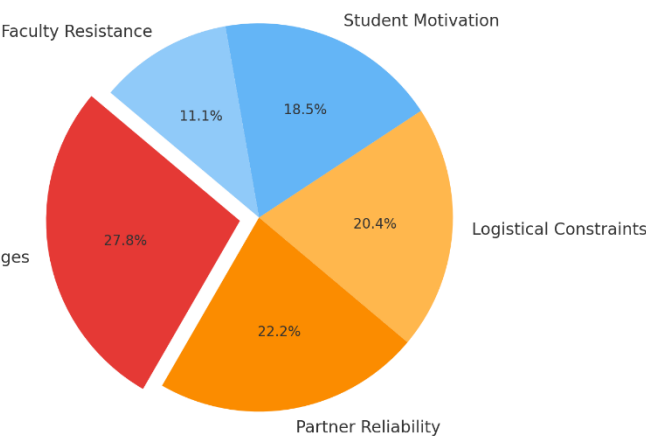


Figure 2

Pie Chart 1: Student Satisfaction with Program Components

The first chart shows overall satisfaction levels (Satisfied: 62.5%, Neutral: 21.25%, Dissatisfied: 16.25%).

The second (exploded) chart breaks down the "Satisfied" segment into:

Partner Organization Role: 70%

Faculty Guidance: 65%

Logistical Support: 60%

Reflection Sessions: 55%

Pie Chart 2: Challenges Faced by Public Universities

Major challenges include:

Funding Shortages (75%) — highlighted in red
Partner Reliability (60%)
Logistical Constraints (55%)
Student Motivation (50%)
Faculty Resistance (30%)

Table 7: One-Way ANOVA Comparing Academic Years

Variable	1st Year (M,SD)	2nd Year (M,SD)	3rd Year (M,SD)	4th Year (M,SD)	F(3,196)	p- value	η^2
Civic Awareness	3.9 (0.8)	4.1 (0.9)	4.3 (0.7)	4.4 (0.8)	4.72	.003**	0.07
Critical Thinking	3.4 (0.9)	3.6 (0.8)	3.8 (0.7)	3.9 (0.8)	3.95	.009**	0.06

**p < .01
Interpretation The ANOVA outcomes indicate substantial improvement in the performance of the students over the academic years ($p = .003$ in the case of civic awareness; $p = .009$ in the case of critical thinking), with small, yet significant effect sizes ($\eta^2 = 0.06-0.07$). There was a significant difference in the scoring of the fourth-year students as compared to the first-years in both domains with post hoc tests indicating a definite developmental pattern. This positive increase is probably an indication of the cumulative learning through course work and also through the various repetitions of the community engagement activities. That pattern lies in favor of experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984) through repeated cycles of reflection and experience, which results in the development of skills. effect sizes are rather small, though, indicating that academic year accounts only 6-7 percent of the outcome variance, which means that other variables (program quality, individual motivation) have more significant influence on students development.

Table 8: t-Test for Gender Differences

Variable	Male (M,SD)	Female (M,SD)	t-value	p-value
Teamwork	4.1 (0.7)	3.9 (0.8)	1.87	.063
Communication Skills	3.8 (0.9)	4.0 (0.8)	-1.63	.105

There were no statistically significant gender differences ($p = .063$ and $p = .105$, respectively), although there were some numerical differences (higher scores of males in teamwork; females in communication). These noneffective results concur with current meta-analyses that suggest insignificant gender differences in service-learning outcomes (Warren, 2012). The findings are that community service programs engender these interpersonal skills between the Pakistani gender. The almost significant difference in teamwork ($p = .063$) could be examined in future research with more significant samples since, according to certain literature, the cultural aspect can moderate the effects of gender in collaborative learning (Ahmed & Khan, 2017). The gender equity in results, in general, validates the inclusiveness of the contemporary program designs.

Discussion

Results of the present research have informed the researcher with useful information about the effectiveness of community service program in Pakistani universities especially in Lahore region. The given comparative analysis of public and private institutions has shown that there are substantial differences in the structure of provided programs, student outcomes, and the effect on the community that should be examined carefully. The origins of these differences seem to be in the institutional resources, pedagogical strategies, and administration support systems, which help to produce the overall quality and efficacy of community engagement initiative. The demographic breakdown of the sample allowed distributing the representation fairly in terms of the type of universities, gender, and academic years, making the comparative analysis more valid. This methodological strength will enable the generalization of the findings to the larger population of the university students involved in community service in the region with a lot of assurance. This balance between the public and the private is especially noteworthy considering that Pakistan has a dual-track higher education system in which the privately founded universities tend to have better financial resources but also cater to a more socioeconomically advantaged student body (Ali & Khan, 2021).

The structural variation in the programs in public and private universities demonstrates a clear picture of superiority of the privately funded university to the publicly funded universities in virtually all counted aspects. The vast differences in the curricular integration, faculty mentorship and reflections activities imply the radical dissimilarity in the community service programming. The given findings correspond to the past research indicating that private universities in the developing countries tend to be more flexible in terms of the possibility to innovate and introduce the model of experiential learning (Hussain & Sultan, 2020). The better showing of the privately owned institutions could be the result of many factors with smaller student-faculty ratios, larger institutional autonomy and a bigger chunk of financial resources being channeled to development of the programs being just a few of them. The outlier in the hour requirements, in which both sectors scored similarly, points to the fact that the time obligations can be standardized, but the quality and the learning contribution of these hours vary significantly. The outcomes of student development indicate that community service programs have the strongest effects on the development of civic awareness and teamwork skills and the comparatively less impressive effects on the development of critical thinking and lasting engagement. Such a trend indicates the possibility of programs being more focused on service provision rather than more in-depth cognitive examination of social challenges, which is often viewed as a criticism of community service oriented models that have not been strongly integrated into academic curriculum (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Their interpersonal scores were higher than the analytical competencies, which could be due to the Pakistani education system focusing on collectivity rather than individuals critically thinking (Ali & Farooq, 2018). This observation has significant implications regarding redesigning of the programs, indicating that it may be necessary to include more formal reflection exercises and elements of academia that would compel students to think more critically about underlying causes of societal ills, as opposed to merely treating symptoms.

The dramatic dissimilarities between state and private university scholar results replicate the institutional inequalities noted in the preceding. It also leads to the support of the hypothesis that the quality of programs has a direct relationship with student learning since the results of the private institutions were consistently superior in all of the measured dimensions. The difference in sustained engagement (3.8 vs. 3.2) is especially notable, and it seems that more well-structured programs could leave a more permanent mark on the civic involvement of

students. This result concurs with the longitudinal studies conducted by Astin et al. (2000), which revealed the association of high-quality service-learning experience with the long-term civic engagement. The gap in civic awareness (4.5 vs. 3.9) can be related to the variations in the pre-university socialization experiences since the students of the private university usually have a more privileged background, which facilitated exposure to the ideas of community engagement (Khan & Ahmad, 2019).

Data on student satisfaction shows valuable details regarding the implementation of the program. Although partner organization roles were the most highly rated in terms of satisfaction, reflection sessions were the least approved, which is a pity considering that more learning could have been involved. This observation substantiates the discussion of Eyler and Giles (1999) who claim that reflection can be viewed as the glue that makes service-learning stick, as it turns mere volunteerism into profound learning. The middling level of satisfaction with faculty advising indicates that there is a possibility to enhance academic oversight and mentorship which are the key issues to maximize the outcomes of education (Jacoby, 2015). The neutral responses (25%) regarding the logistical support could be due to the institutional ambivalence with the resources allocation and coordination.

The obstacles noted by administrators reveal system-wide impediments to program quality, mostly in the public universities. This centuries-old underinvestment in state higher education in Pakistan is displayed in the dramatic funding imbalance (75% vs. 40%) (Hoodbhoy, 2021). This resource gap has a ripple effect whereby faculty have little time to spent on mentorship, infrastructure to ventures in community partnership and materials to strengthen the program. The report on partner reliability problems by both sectors (60% vs. 45%) indicates the need of more formal partnership agreement and long term relationship building as is found in the best practices in community engagement (Sandy & Holland, 2006). The reduced faculty opposition in the privately owned institutions (20% vs. 30%) could reflect a faculty acceptance which is stronger in case of well-organized and fully supported programs. The implication of this finding is that institutions of higher learning must change their service delivery models to asset-based and participatory models that develop the capacity of the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The discrepancy between student effort and long-term effects indicates the necessity of additional mutual partnerships in which community organizations contribute to the program objectives and standards of evaluation. These results bear a number of policy and practice implications.

Firstly, the undisputed excellence of the private university programs over an extended period of time implies that the structure of the state institutions may be enhanced by incorporation of the same structural features, specifically the aspects of curricular coherence, faculty resources, and the elements of reflection. This has to be weighed, however, with the very tangible resource pressures that public universities are under. Some creative solutions could involve faculty development program, inter-university consortium and strategic alliance with NGO in sharing of resources. Second, the predominance of the civic mindfulness, as opposed to critical thinking, implies the necessity to enhance the academicity of the community service educational programs, possibly, by introducing a requirement of coursework or research part involving systemic scrutiny of societal problems.

The research also evokes crucial questions concerning equality in exposure to excellent community engagement opportunities. Assuming that the students in the private universities are always given the better programming, then this will widen the gaps that exist in developing civic leaders. Policy makers could think about having national standards or accreditation criteria of the community service programs so that there are minimum quality standards in all the institutions. Also, we could come up with funding mechanisms to fund

initiatives of public universities; this could be in the form of government grants or even through public-private partnerships. A number of limitations are to be taken into consideration. The research was limited to Lahore and the findings cannot be used to represent other areas of Pakistan which have varying educational and socioeconomic settings. The quantitative approach, offering as it does useful comparative data, might have overlooked subtle qualitative information regarding program implementation and effect. Mixed methods may be used in future studies to be able to get a better elaboration of the student experience and community attitudes. It would also be useful to have longitudinal studies that evaluate long term effects on the students and the communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that community service programs in Pakistani universities show promise but require significant refinement to maximize their educational and social impact. The disparities between public and private institutions highlight systemic inequities in higher education that extend beyond community engagement to broader questions of educational quality and access. By addressing structural weaknesses, strengthening academic integration, and fostering more reciprocal community partnerships, universities can transform these programs into powerful vehicles for student development and social change. As Pakistan continues to grapple with complex social challenges, high-quality university-community engagement can play a vital role in developing socially responsible graduates equipped to contribute meaningfully to national development.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, following recommendations emerge.

- First, universities should strengthen the academic integration of community service programs by developing structured curricula with clear learning outcomes, mandatory reflection components, and faculty-guided analysis of social issues.
- Second, public institutions particularly need increased funding and resource allocation for community engagement initiatives, potentially through government grants or public-private partnerships, to bridge the quality gap with private universities.
- Third, programs should shift from short-term service projects to long-term, reciprocal community partnerships that emphasize capacity-building and sustainability rather than one-time interventions.
- Fourth, faculty development programs should be implemented to enhance mentoring skills and increase buy-in for community-engaged teaching, addressing the current gaps in guidance quality.
- Finally, a national framework or accreditation standards for university community service programs could help ensure minimum quality benchmarks across institutions while allowing flexibility for local adaptation, promoting both consistency and innovation in student civic development.

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