

Journal of Educational Research & Social Sciences Review (JERSSR)

Undergraduate Students Community Service Participation for Promoting Civic Engagement in Universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad

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Abstract



Sustainable development is an underlying goal of Higher Education, which is largely achieved by universities through community service and research projects. Participation of students in community development projects aims to develop their civic engagement and prepares them as future leaders in their fields. This descriptive research was therefore conducted as a baseline study to examine the nature of community service conducted by university students and their civic engagement. A questionnaire was administered on 984 purposively sampled undergraduate students from six public sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, who had engaged in community work. In order to draw relevant findings, frequency, percentage, and quantitative descriptive analyses were conducted to figure out the nature of community service participation of students, and the goals of civic engagement that they achieved. On the basis of the findings, HEIs are recommended to educate students about service learning, and formally train their students for undertaking community projects, with practical suggestions for promoting civic engagement through community service for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Community Service Participation, Community Engagement, Service Learning, Community Work, Student Development in Higher Education

Introduction

The world is witnessing an extensive degradation with respect to human interactions with nature and with each other, which is reflective of as well as causing a decline in our individual and collective growth and development. One of the major Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 to face this complex challenge is the SDG 4 of Education that aims to provide an accessible quality education to create learning opportunities for all, and through its Target 4.7, specifically promotes active citizenship to contribute towards local and global sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022).

This research was conducted to understand the nature of community development work conducted by students as it is not homogenous due to the different contexts of institutions, the different types of community work, and the person conducting it with varying levels of engagement. This study is significant in the current socio-political milieu of Pakistan, which has posed serious concerns about youth development and the need for civic leadership to train them as productive citizens of the country. The aim of this research was to collect a baseline data for the current analysis of community work participation of students, so that a case for introducing service learning programs integrated with community work as part of the core curriculum across the disciplines may be introduced in universities.

Role of Higher Education Institutions in Community Development

Universities are central part of a society and therefore, play an important role in its advancement through research and community development. One of the key purposes of higher education is to create active citizens who help in the growth of their communities. In order to achieve these targets, education sector policies and practices need to focus on community-based research and development projects, whereby learners engage in real-life problem solving activities for offer new solutions to a

sustainable future (Hussain, 2007). The established link between community development and student's participation in community service warrants the education system to give the chance to every student to participate in real life and cater to their community's needs (Khanna, 2011).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) aim to serve their communities through programs and projects that are designed to develop students' attitude for altruism and encourage their participation in community service. Students' participation in community development specifically encourages partnerships that enhance mutually beneficial outcomes for university as well as community. Universities have to interact with different communities by variety of ways, and community participation is one of the best ways for enhancing the HEIs productivity and students learning outcomes (Jacob, Sutin, Weidman & Yeager, 2015). Students who experience community work at higher education level can contribute to their institutions and communities through different means, therefore, it is not only beneficial for students but also for the institutions and their communities at large (Keegan, 2007).

Research on Service Learning and Community Service in Higher Education

Although Service Learning (SL) and Community Service (CS) participation have been under the research lens for decades, there is a dearth of systematic research studies within higher education of Pakistan on students' participation in community work as community work and service learning are still nascent phenomena in higher education of Pakistan.

Majority of the work on SL or CS in Pakistan has been carried out to evaluate some project-based intervention or international partnership programs such as, the five U.S. and Pakistani universities partnership in 2012 involved a preliminary qualitative case study aimed at comprehending Pakistani students' views on service-learning. The results showed the students' aspiration for an education that not only equips them with skills for future careers, but also for serving the community, a discrepancy between the current state and their expectations of education, concerns about empowerment, and the importance of managing risks (Morrison, 2016). A quantitative inquiry was conducted by Ahmad, Said, and Mohamad (2019b) to study the perspectives of teachers in Pakistan's vocational training institutes regarding their students' outcomes of participation in SL. The scarcity of research in this area in Pakistan reflects the lack of formal SL and Community work programs

From the global perspective, there is ample research on the educational and professional benefits for university students engaging in community service, which has increased the need for and emphasis on promoting their participation in community work (Astin, 1991; Fleischauer & Fleischauer, 1994; Rhoads, 1998), however the review of literature indicates a sporadic research interest in the phenomenon across the years to fully capture its benefits. Research studies on the area largely cover the time that students dedicate to community work activities (Astin, 1993; Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999) or what motivates or enables students to engage in community work (Fitch, 1987; Serow, 1991; Winniford, Carpenter & Grider, 1995), and on effects and benefits of SL on student development (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001; Richard, Keen, Hatcher & Pease, 2017).

Importance of Community Work in Pakistan's Higher Education

Established on egalitarian principles, Pakistan needs a participatory community to grow as a strong democratic economy. Economic growth and community development are strongly tied to higher education for the supply of trained professional leaders for the advancement of a community. Pakistan having a rapidly growing population, is at a junction of either a great opportunity or a serious crisis (Madsen, 2009), which seems more imminent in the absence of local community-based development infrastructures and abundance of untrained and disengaged human resources. Hina, Ajmal, Rahman, and Jumani (2011) found that Pakistani school students are lacking in the skills that are fostered through civic participation due to a lack of such activities conducted in schools. When such students enter higher education, they face the threat of becoming vulnerable to socio-political unrest in the country, which is exacerbated by graduate unemployment and a lack of proper skills-based training to add to the workforce (Farooq et al., 2014). This critical situation demands educational leaders to focus their attention towards civic education and service learning in order to engage youth in their communities' development (Broga, 2016).

Due to the global and local interest in promoting undergraduate students participation in community work as there is a dearth of civic values, knowledge and skills in the youth (Dean, 2008; Haider, 2014, Hussain, 2007), public sector universities and colleges in Pakistan have recently

included sustainable community development as part of their mission and vision statements in their bid to propel the achievement of SDGs by creating future professional leaders, who integrate sustainability in the country's policies and practices (UNICEF, 2012). Some Pakistani universities have started to offer formal courses and informal trainings and seminars on civic education or service learning and require undergraduate students to participate in community work as a course, extra-curricular activity or degree requirement.

Research Problem

Public sector universities in Pakistan carry a huge responsibility to actively plan and devise opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in community work in order to contribute in the sustainable development of the country. Despite the introduction of community work in undergraduate programs, there is a lack of serious realization of and commitment of the universities as well as of the students towards attaining the targets of SDG 4, and especially Target 4.7 of civic engagement for sustainable development, which is reflected in the dearth of formal service learning programs and research available on their impact on the students and local communities.

This research is conducted to study the perceptions of students regarding their community work. These reflections are important to inform the field and to add to the research literature regarding the nature of community work being done by university students, the experiential learning taking place, and to learn how students' participation in community work can be improved to sustain their contributions after graduation in order to have its large scale impact on community development.

Research Objectives

1. To study the nature of undergraduate students' participation in community work.
2. To investigate the nature of students' civic engagement in community service to provide insights for improving their learning.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of community service that undergraduate students participate in?
2. What is the nature of undergraduate students' civic engagement in community service?

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms have been employed in this research and defined below:

Community Service (CS) / Community Work. Since the term Community Work is more prevalent in Pakistan, the terms community service and community work are interchangeably used to make meaning for both the research participants as well as for the researchers. According to Astin and Sax (1998), "Community work/development can have a range of aspects like being involved in local or neighbourhood groups, being a volunteer or unpaid worker, being involved in a non-profit association, doing public benefit work, doing work for a cause", which broadly encompasses most types of community work done by students in Pakistani universities.

Service Learning (SL). Service Learning is defined as a program or credited course, which is based on knowledge and experiential learning opportunities that enable students to acquire and develop new knowledge and skills, cultivate a sense of civic responsibility by working in collaboration with peers and community members, and reflect on their community services (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Civic Engagement. Civic engagement is simply defined as involvement in community service. Checkoway and Aldana (2013, p.1894) define civic engagement as "a process in which people take collective action to address issues of public concern."

Civic Responsibility. According to Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998, p.15), civic responsibility "is the sense of personal responsibility individuals should feel to uphold their obligations as part of any community."

Significance of Research

This study was significant in the following ways:

1. It investigates the nature of undergraduate students' participation in community service, and adds valuable insights to the research on community service in higher education of Pakistan.
2. It provides practical recommendations for improving the current status of SL and community service, in order to create and provide quality higher education opportunities to the graduates with respect to their civic engagement in community work for sustainable development.

Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of Service Learning (SL) and Community Service (CS) programs in higher education to understand their nature, and a comprehensive review of the research on outcomes of student engagement in those programs and activities, followed by the theoretical underpinnings of this research that guide the conceptualization of this study.

Nature of Community Work in Universities of Pakistan

Community work in HEIs of Pakistan is considered a way of conducting teaching and learning through educational research or community-based projects that involve communities in collaborative activities to identify the developmental needs of and opportunities for communities, while also enriching the teaching, learning and research objectives of the university.

Propelled by the international movement towards sustainable development, and Pakistan Higher Education Commission's drive to help achieve the SDGs by 2030, a number of universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad have established both formal curricular and co-curricular activities for community work projects for their students (Ahmed, Ali, Gul & Ali, 2019a).

Pakistani universities aim to foster community engagement among students for which educators and administrators need to design and implement service-learning. Educators in Pakistan, particularly those interested in promoting civic engagement, have shown interest in the advantages of service-learning (Aslam, Jaffery & Zaidi, 2011; Dean, 2007). In 2012, a few U.S. and five Pakistani universities teamed up for the establishment of a service-learning program through civic engagement (Morrison, 2016). In 2014, British Council in Pakistan initiated an Active Citizenship program through which university teachers, including the researcher, were trained on instructing a core course developed by it, which was based on one academic course on active citizenship, and one practical course on field-based community project, which was apart from other community work requirements of the some of the universities. Funded project-based interventions like these may be adopted by some universities, but unless Higher Education Commission Departments of all the provinces do not institute it across the disciplines in the universities of Pakistan, its impact cannot be measured or researched.

Research on Impact of Community Service Participation on Student Development

Research on Service Learning and Community Service in higher education is sporadic and focused on their academic, psycho-social, moral and socio-economic benefits for students (Astin, et al., 2000; Eyler, et al., 2001; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Prentice & Robinson, 2010; Singleton, 2007). Research provides evidence that engaging in community work activities not only helps others, it adds to the educational benefits of the service providers as well such as making positive effects on students' cognitive skills and reasoning abilities (Batchelder & Root, 1994), providing opportunities for students to improve communication skills, and develop professionalism in their disciplines (Hayward, DiMarco, Kranz & Evans, 2001). Egerton (2003) also found that higher education had positive effects on the social and civic participation of students. Students who participate in community work services tend to be more efficient and involved in their education, and find more scholarship opportunities to contribute locally and internationally (Parsons, 2011).

Richard et al. (2017) explored how much Service Learning activities conducted by undergraduate alumni during college years predicted their civic-minded orientation, civic action, and volunteerism after college. Astin et al. (1999) studied long term effects of community volunteerism among undergraduate students and found that students who spend higher number of hours in community engagement, they experience positive behavioural outcomes such as, degree attainment, alumni contributions, and community engagement after graduation. It is found that students who participate in community service, later volunteer and stay committed to their communities (Astin, 1984; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Theoretical Foundations for Students Participation in Community Service

This research is based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey that emphasizes upon citizens' role in democratic societies. Dewey argued in *Democracy and Education* (1916) that a democratic society requires citizens who are aware of and prepared for by virtue of their education to play their constructive role in the development of a country by following democratic principles for the common good. His pragmatist theory constructs education as a learning experience for active citizen participation in the society's socio-political and economic development (Ahmad, et. al., 2019b). According to Dewey learning citizenship skills is at its most effective when learners are engaged in community service to learn about and solve real-life problems (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). This

conceptualization of education resulted in the introduction of service learning in the 60s and saw its gradual implementation across the higher education institutions in the 70s (Birdwell, Scott & Horley, 2013).

Besides Dewey's concept of education for democracy, this research is based upon David Kolb's theory of constructivist experiential learning proposed in 1974 (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001), which formulates education as a constructive process of active learning, whereby students engage in applying their acquired and derived knowledge and skills in real-life situations to create new knowledge (Billig, 2012). The nature of SL and community engagement is embedded in Kolb's experiential learning model (Kolb, 2005), which presents learning development as a constructive process in which students are involved in identifying a real-life problem, devising a plan to address it, applying their plan in their contexts, obtaining the outcomes and reflecting upon their learning to add to the knowledge.

This quantitative research was, therefore, planned as a baseline study to do the current analysis of SL and CS in Pakistani public sector universities, in order to study how universities formalize community service in higher education, what types of and how community work is planned or offered by public sector universities and what is the nature of students' engagement in it, which may enable them to actively partake in the development of the country.

Methodology

Research Approach

In order to investigate the nature of students' participation in community work of public and semi-public universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, a quantitative descriptive study was designed to learn about the students' perceptions about their community work engagement. The descriptive research approach helps examine the current situation of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2002), and was therefore deemed appropriate to conduct a current analysis of students' community service and engagement in higher education.

Population

The population of this research study comprised of undergraduate students in all 11 public sector General Education universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad to ensure socio-economic and socio-cultural homogeneity. Public universities from the twin cities were taken to capture the data from the whole region as the undergraduate student population from all over the country is represented in these public universities.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Out of the total public sector general education universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, a purposive sample of six universities was selected, where community service is formally required. A sample of 165 undergraduate students from 8th semester, who had engaged in community work, was purposively and conveniently selected from six departments within the faculties of social sciences and humanities at each university, which totalled to a sample size of 990 students from six universities. In the university where community work was a mandatory degree requirement, the students were conveniently sampled. However where only few departments conducted community work projects, the students were sampled purposively by the researcher to fulfil the purpose of this research.

Research Tool

For this research a questionnaire was developed by the researcher in the light of research on community service and its activities, which was administered on undergraduate students who had participated in community work projects. The questionnaire consisted of 8 five-point Likert scale item statements, 7 multiple-choice checklist questions, and was divided into 2 themes, which were:

1. Nature of Community Work
2. Students' Civic Engagement

The researcher administered a questionnaire on the sampled students to investigate the nature of community work, and civic engagement of the undergraduate students.

Instrument Validity

Determining the content validity of an instrument is an important step in the development of an instrument to check the appropriateness of the instrument items. Content validity is defined as the extent to which items and questions of an instrument are relevant to and represent the theme or construct of a particular research (Yusoff, 2019). For this purpose, the researcher sought help from the experts of tool development for the sake of face validity and content validity. The feedback of the

field experts guided the researcher to design a contextually suitable instrument with respect to the themes of research for collecting data that met the purpose of this study.

Instrument Reliability

A pilot testing was conducted for checking the reliability of the questionnaire, which is an important step for instrument development and administration. Although the minimum recommended sample size for piloting a survey is 30 participants, there may be larger sample size for a pilot study (Johanson and Brooks, 2009). Therefore, to calculate the reliability of the civic engagement scale, the questionnaire was piloted on 119 students, who represented the population but were not included in the sample from the six public sector universities.

To find out the appropriate suitability of the civic engagement scale with its thematic context, the researcher calculated the alpha reliability of the descriptive data.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha for Theme Civic Engagement (Likert Scale)

Reliability Statistics		
N	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
119	.907	8

The Internal consistency of the Likert scale shows Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.907, which depicts a very high consistency of the items statements with their theme of civic engagement, as it is greater than the acceptable value of 0.70 for reliability of an instrument. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered appropriate to collect data for this research.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher visited the six sampled universities and obtained permission from the relevant authorities to collect data from the undergraduate students. The researcher gave out a total of 990 questionnaires and received 984 questionnaires with complete valid responses. The results are therefore computed for 984 students. The data was tabulated to analyse the nature of community work through frequency, percentage and descriptive analyses.

Results

The results are presented according to the themes of the study to address the research questions. The data were analysed through frequency and percentage analysis of a yes-no and multiple-choice questions, and through descriptive analysis of the Likert scale item statements to calculate the mean and standard deviations of the data in order to summarize the results.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of results of this study is presented below:

Theme 1: Nature of community work. The first theme of the study was to ascertain the nature of community work performed by the students.

Place of Community Work. For this, students were first asked about the places where they conducted their community work, the response to which is provided in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Place of Community Work

Response	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage%
Hospital	134	14
School	257	26
Library (university/public)	0	0
Child Care Center	37	4
Local Municipal Corporation, or Public Services Department / Government Office	116	12
Community Center or Civil Society Organization	192	19
NGO / INGO	248	25
Total N	984	100

Table 2 helps to identify the nature of students' participation in community work. The response most frequently selected by participants is schools (26%), closely followed by NGO/INGOs (25%), in which students conducted their community work. Cumulatively, when the percentages are added for community work done in hospitals (14%), local government offices (12%) and civil societies (19%), it emerges that a good 33% did their community work in organizations which directly offer civic services. Adding the private and non-profit NGO sector involvement raises the percentage

even further (58%), which is a positive sign. After the government policy to not offer work to students in the library, it is not a surprise that no one from the participants did community work in libraries, which used to have a fair share of participation in the past.

Status of Community Work. The second question to learn about the nature of community work to find out the status of the community work as a reason for doing it during their program. The responses are presented below in Table 3:

Table 3
Status / Reason for doing Community Work

Community work done as	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage %
A degree requirement	195	20
Part of coursework project	457	46
Extra-curricular activity	332	34
Total	984	100

Table 3 shows that a majority of the students did their community work projects either voluntarily as an extra-curricular activity (34%) or as part of a course requirement (46%). Only 20 percent students conducted their community service as part of the university or degree requirement, which was of two universities, and reflects their seriousness towards sustainable community development.

Duration of Community Work. The third question was about the duration of community work project that the students participated for, the results of which are presented below.

Table 4
Duration of Community Work

Community Work Duration	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage %
1-3 Weeks	165	12
4-6 Weeks	573	45
One Semester (4-6 months)	246	42
Total	984	100

The duration of community work was dependent on whether it was a university degree requirement or not as where it was required for degree completion, all the students did their community work for the limited duration of 1-3 weeks, whereas 42 percent students' participation in community projects was for one whole semester (4 to 6 months) as their research projects were designed around solving community problems. A majority (45%) of the students however, did their community work for a reasonable duration of 4-6 weeks.

Area of Community Work. The fourth question was to figure out the nature of community work that the participants did in a particular area, which further clarifies the nature of their service.

Table 5
Area of Community Work Conducted

Response	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage%
Civic Administrative Work (Office work, Resource Generation etc.)	308	32
Hospital Admin / Health Care / Counselling	134	14
Teaching Multiple Skills in Community Schools	294	30
Community Development Work (resource mobilization, trainings etc.)	248	26
Total	984	100

Table 5 reveals that the nature of community work conducted by most of the participants was administrative (32%), closely followed by teaching at community schools (30%), and community development work (26%).

University-Community linkages. Question five was a yes-no type question to learn if the HEI and the community work place had any formal association for collaboration, which is presented in table 4 below:

Table 6
University and Community Linkages for Collaboration

Response	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage %
Yes	514	52

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No	353	36
Uncertain	117	12
Total	984	100

Table 6 shows that although a majority (52%) of the participants took benefit of the linkages between the universities’ departments and the community organizations to collaborate with each other, a considerable number of participants (36%) did not think so, and together with those who were uncertain (12%) of any such collaborations, 48 percent of the participants pointed out that such collaborations were apparently missing or not known by them.

Theme 2: Nature of Students Civic Engagement. The second theme of the study was the nature of students’ civic engagement, which was gauged through aspects of civic engagement, service learning goals that they achieved and the civic responsibilities they undertook during their community service.

Civic Engagement. The next set of questions were based on Likert Scale items to measure the agreeableness of the participants regarding their engagement in their community work. The data of the five point scale was summarized into three points of Agreeability (A=3), Disagreeability (D=1), and Uncertainty (U=2), for data presentation purposes. The results of the item analysis was carried out through frequency, percentage and descriptive quantitative analysis, which is presented in Table 6 below:

Table 7

Descriptive Analysis of Students Civic Engagement

Item Statement	Frequency f			Percentage %			Mean	SD
	A	DA	UN	A	DA	UN		
Civic Responsibility	538	257	189	55	26	19	2.29	.85
Direct Contribution to Civic Engagement	584	213	187	59	22	19	2.34	.82
Linkage between Academic learning and Civic responsibilities	614	197	173	62	20	18	2.42	.80
Opportunity for Field work experience	888	56	40	90	6	4	2.84	.50
Involved community member for Feedback	662	147	175	67	15	18	2.52	.74
Community work experience met Service Learning Goals	669	137	178	68	14	18	2.54	.73
Future involvement in Community Development projects	718	158	108	73	16	11	2.62	.67
Encourage other students for Community Projects	831	95	58	84	10	6	2.75	.61
Total Theme Average	688	158	139	70	16	14	2.54	.72

As the percentage analysis depicts, although more than half (55%) of the sampled participants reported that they assumed a sense of civic responsibility as a result of their community work, a total of 45 percent also indicated that they did not feel that their community work instilled a sense of civic responsibility in them, which is also reflected in their response to the next item in which a total of 41 percent of respondents did not agree that their community work directly contributed to civic engagement. The slightly low mean values of 2.29 and 2.3 from the average mean value of 2.54 also indicate that although the community work was conducted in most community service organizations, the students did not see that the nature of their activities was directly relevant to civic work.

The most agreed to responses by the students were getting the opportunity to do field work during community service (90%), willingness to encourage other students for community projects (84%), and commitment to future involvement in community development (73%), all of which are significantly positive effects of community engagement. The average mean value of the theme 2.54 is close to the top value of 3 points set for agreement, and therefore, shows students’ general agreement to the aspects that foster civic engagement.

Service Learning goals. In order to learn about the type of Service Learning goals achieved through community engagement, a multiple-choice question was asked in which the students could select as many goals as they found true, whose frequency and percentage analysis are provided in Table 8:

Table 8

Service Learning Goals achieved during Community Work (select as many as true)

Response	Frequency f	Percentage %
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Undergraduate Students Community Service Participation for.....Panni, Hina & Junaid

Awareness about community's needs	793	81
Direct involvement with community	581	59
Commitment to Civic Service	478	49
Professional development	522	53
Sense of community ownership	283	29
Use of abilities and talent	456	46

Table 8 provides an overview of the SL goals that the students perceived to have achieved through civic engagement. On an aggregate, 81 percent of the students gained awareness about their community's needs, although only 59 percent had direct involvement with the community. Almost half (49%) of the participants affirmed developing commitment to civic service, however, only 29 percent developed a sense of ownership towards the community. Almost half of the respondents agreed that their community engagement professionally developed them (53%), and utilized and polished their abilities and talents (46%).

Civic Responsibilities. The next multiple choice question to select as many options as deemed correct by the respondents was related to the civic responsibilities that the students learned during their community work. The results are given in Table 9 below:

Table 9

Civic Responsibilities learned during Community Work (select as many as true)

Response	Frequency <i>f</i>	Percentage %
Learn Democratic Processes	251	26
Respect others' opinions	432	44
Stay informed about community's issues	684	70
Obey Government laws	756	77
Promote welfare of community	798	81
Report Public complaints	312	32
Take Action to solve problem	873	89
Create Awareness	906	92
Effectively Manage community	781	79
Utilize community resources honestly	672	68
Hold yourself accountable to authorities	773	79

The research backed civic responsibilities which enhance civic engagement, and the majority of the students learned during their community service were creating awareness about issues (92%), promoting community welfare (81%), and taking action to solve problems (89%). However, the rest of the civic responsibilities, which are pertinent to learn civic skills, seem to have been of low utility as data reveals that most students were not directly engaged with civic responsibilities, such as democratic processes of voting and electing, and reporting public complaints to the concerned authorities.

The data analysis above provides insights into the nature of community work offered to and conducted by the students, as well as the nature of students' civic engagement, which helped the researchers to find the answers to the research questions, which are analysed in the discussion chapter.

Major Findings and Discussion

The major findings of the study show that students' participation in the community work projects was a purposeful experience for the participants. The analysis of the results shows that by participating in community work projects students acquired the outcomes of civic engagement. A detailed discussion of the findings is presented here with respect to their thematic analysis.

Nature of Community Service

The first research question posed in this study was on the nature of community service/work/social work projects, and though their nature greatly varies from one university and community organization to another. However, it is possible to identify a few common trends through this research to explain the nature of community work projects conducted in the universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Place of community work. To examine the nature of community work projects of students, multiple questions were designed, which revealed that a majority of the students did their community work in organizations which were directly concerned with civic services, such as community service centers, community schools, non-profit organization and local government offices. However, since the students themselves sought such opportunities, at times there was little connection between the disciplinary background of the students (social sciences and humanities groups) and the type of

organization they worked in, and therefore, the nature of their contribution was limited to assisting in carrying out administrative tasks, in such cases.

The public universities bear a huge responsibility towards giving direction to the increasing bulge of undergraduate student body, and therefore, they need to fill this gap by aligning the students' academic pursuits with their community participation to reap positive benefit for the students as well as for the community. Research supports that university leaders including student affairs administrators, and faculty members design and offer research and service learning opportunities to students for them to engage in community service activities as productive individuals and citizens (Wurr & Hamilton, 2012).

Status of community work. Only 12 percent of the respondents were required to participate in community work for the completion of their degree program. Whereas, the rest of students participated in service activities either as part of a course or as extra-curricular activities recommended by their departments. A high rate of students participation in community service as reflects that undergraduate students are eager to participate in community development and this is a positive sign for the universities to seriously take up their responsibility towards embedding community work and service learning in the undergraduate curriculum, so as to propel the movement for sustainable development across the disciplines in a more organized manner.

Duration of community work. Finding the duration of community work is important to learn about its importance for the universities as an activity for community development as well as its significance in terms of the time and effort invested by the students to achieve its goals. Where community work is required for degree completion, the duration was limited to 1-3 weeks or 20-30 contact hours, which is a fairly short time period to learn about a community and make meaningful contributions for it as well as for students own self. Where community work was part of a course or research project, the duration also increased up to a semester, which may have yielded better results in terms of the students' contribution and learning. However, a majority of the work was done for an average duration of 4-6 weeks, which might be just sufficient to acquaint students with the workings of an organization and get some work done for a specific project of the organization. Since duration of community work affects its quantity and quality (Astin et al., 1999), universities and community organizations need to carefully plan such activities for everyone's benefit.

Area and type of community participation. The findings reveals that students conducted different kinds of activities while doing community work. A majority of students performed administrative tasks relevant to the civic organizations they worked in, such as, non-profit organizations and civil societies or public offices, which directly impact the community development. This was closely followed by teaching at community schools and community development work such as resource mobilization and trainings etcetera, which is reflected in the civic responsibilities taken and the service learning goals that the students achieved. The area of civic participation may be improved and its scope may be expanded by directly involving the university and community leaders to plan for and assess the participation of the students.

Institute and community collaboration. Although half of the respondents reported university and community partnership by virtue of which they conducted the community work, however, adding the negative and uncertain responses which did not affirm to any such collaboration, amounts to 48 percent which weighs in the fact that such collaborative activities are much needed especially in the wake of the efforts being made to achieve SDG 4, Target 4.7, which focuses on community development through active citizenship of students. If the universities, especially the Student Affairs administrators plan and organize community work opportunities by developing linkages with their communities, the students participation may be more aligned with their targeted professions and empower them to make positive contributions as well. This requires university linkages with community organization to guide community practices as well as to guide the curricula for service learning, by incorporating appropriate experiential learning opportunities, and by offering service learning and community development programs (Dar-el-Tarbiah, 2014).

Nature of Students' Civic Engagement

In order to determine the nature of community work, civic engagement of the students was an important aspect to investigate through the activities performed by them and the service learning goals they achieved as a consequence of those practical experiences. The descriptive analysis of the civic engagement activities shows that although the community work was conducted in mostly community

service organizations, the students did not see that the nature of their activities was directly relevant to civic work. This reflects their lack of understanding about how administrative work is also vital for community development and is considered as a part of civic engagement. This lack comes from the lack of service learning training which would prepare them about the nature of service and how it impacts us as well as the community at large.

Over all, a high mean value reflected that majority of students engaged in civic activities in the field, achieved service learning goals, and drew connections with their academic learning through the experience of coursework based community projects. They reported willingness to continue community service and encourage others as well, which reflects their positive learning experience, and an understanding of the need for participating in community service for a sustainable future.

Service Learning goals. Through community engagement, the students noted that they developed awareness about community needs, formed a commitment to public service, received professional development, utilized their talents and abilities, were involved with community members, and cultivated a sense of ownership through the experience of community work which are major goals of service learning. Community participation offers undergraduate students concrete experiences in non-profit organizations, local government departments, civil societies, etcetera, which opens doors for future employability as well (Astin et al., 1999; Astin et al., 2000; Khanna, 2011).

Civic responsibilities. The findings with respect to achieving the SL goals by undertaking civic responsibilities show that most of the students learned about civic responsibilities, such as staying informed about community's issues and creating awareness by promoting community welfare, following the law to manage the community, respecting other's opinions, utilizing community resources with honesty and accountability, and following the democratic process through civic engagement. De Haan (2010) supports these findings as community engagement increases students' critical thinking, and decision making ability to make better judgments about their responsibilities.

The findings reveal the individual and cumulative benefits of community engagement that the students of multiple universities reaped despite having a variety of different types of community work. In order to promote active citizenship during the current challenging times faced by Pakistan, HEIs have a pivotal role to play in this educative process, by engaging students in community service for meeting the local and global challenges (Rhoads, 1998).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion. This research investigated the nature of undergraduate students' community work participation for civic engagement, and has shown that public universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad encourage students' participation in community development projects in a variety of ways. Students who engaged in community service are considered to have developed the civic responsibilities and skills required for civic engagement. The universities' responsibility is to facilitate the students with service learning resources and community work opportunities to ensure an effective participation of students through which they engage in the sustainable development of their local and global communities and become active citizens for the democratic progress of the country.

Recommendations. Some of the major recommendations for the undergraduate students and HEIs are presented here:

1. Active citizenship should be part of HEI's mission statements and annual targets to play their role in sustainable community development.
2. HEIs and students must ensure that their community work is relevant to their field, so that they may effectively learn and contribute their services.
3. A mechanism may be devised in liaison with the community organizations to map their needs and match the right students as civic leaders for undertaking the community projects under the supervision of an instructor and senior community member.
4. HEIs must monitor and provide feedback on students' participation in community work projects.
5. HEIs may provide students with training in democratic processes such as promoting voter registration and create opportunities for students to interact with communities and elected officials to deliberate on solutions for addressing community problems.
6. Additional inquiry may broaden the scope of the research by focusing on impact of community work on Pakistani students and the community, and also use mixed methods research to enrich the literature in the field.

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