

A study on Students' Awareness of Community Engagement Programs at undergraduate level in Mumbai

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Abstract

This research addresses the recognised gap involving the level of awareness about community engagement in higher education (CEHE) programs among undergraduates in Mumbai. The core problem investigated is whether these students are under-informed about CEHE work as part of their educational curricula, which could limit their opportunity to develop necessary real-world competencies and contribute significantly to society. Objectives of the study included measuring student awareness, identifying participation rates, and gauging perceptions regarding the importance of CEHE in the curriculum.

The study utilized a quantitative research method involving a structured, close-ended questionnaire administered via convenience sampling to 65 undergraduate students.

Data analysis focused on descriptive statistics and the chi-square test of association to assess potential relationships, specifically regarding gender. Findings indicate a high level of conceptual awareness, with 90.8% of students reporting being fully aware of CEHE projects in their curriculum. Participation is also robust, with 61.5% having engaged multiple times.

A strong consensus exists on the significance of CEHE in education. Also, chi-square tests consistently confirmed that there exists no statistically significant relationship between gender and students' awareness, participation, or perception across all variables tested. These results offer actionable insights for institutions to optimize communication techniques and program structure to enhance academic and personal growth.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Student Awareness, Higher Education.

Introduction

Community engagement in higher education (CEHE) is being highly recognised as a critical component in holistic development of student, including fostering social responsibility and practical skills among undergraduates (Schiff et al., 2023). The emphasis on CEHE comes from a deeper understanding that universities, going beyond their traditional roles of teaching and research, also hold a civic responsibility to contribute to societal well-being and to address pressing community needs (Gruber, 2017). This major shift integrates community-oriented and field-based programs into curricula, aiming to achieve transformative impacts on both students and local communities while closely aligning with global initiatives in the form of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Cornet et al., 2024).

The integration of CEHE often involves experiential learning methodologies like service-learning, which gels community service with academic course instruction to improve civic competencies and bring a sense

of responsibility among students (Mitchell, 2022). This approach towards CEHE not only enhances academic understanding by applying theoretical knowledge to real-world problems, but also cultivates a deeper sense of civic engagement and social consciousness (Paul et al., 2023) (Kaliappen, 2024). These programs also build the internationalisation of higher education by enabling various universities to address local and societal challenges within their local contexts while adhering to global best practices for service delivery (Amutuhaire, 2023).

However, despite the aforesaid benefits, the success of these programs heavily rests on the awareness levels among the target beneficiaries, particularly undergraduate students (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024). This study, therefore, aims to investigate the extent of awareness regarding community engagement programs among undergraduate students in Mumbai, identifying factors that influence their participation. This research study is critical for optimising the design and dissemination of community engagement initiatives, ensuring they effectively resonate with the students and bring about meaningful university-community collaborations (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024) (Arante et al., 2024).

The researcher may also explore the perceived barriers and facilitators to participation, offering insights that can inform policy adjustments and programmatic enhancements to strengthen civic engagement within the higher education framework within the economy (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024).

Literature Review

Literature review will critically analyse existing literature on community engagement in higher education, focusing on conceptual frameworks, empirical findings regarding student awareness and participation, and the benefits and challenges of such initiatives, particularly in heterogenous mix in urban contexts like Mumbai (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024). The literature reviewed for this study will specifically explore how universities link with societal needs integrating scholarly engagement, promotion of reciprocal knowledge exchange, and overcome obstacles to widespread implementation (Gade & Opoku, 2020). In addition to this, we assess various pedagogical approaches, such as service-learning, which integrates community service with academic instruction to foster a deeper understanding of societal issues and cultivate civic responsibility among students (Duarte et al., 2024).

CEHE programs also aim to enhance student understanding of critical global systems like social, cultural, economic, and political, instilling an appreciation for interconnectedness and the impact of change (Hambidge et al., 2019). This perspective highlights the necessity of resisting a “one-size-fits-all” approach towards community engagement, promoting models that are relevant and avoiding normalising any single view point (Myers, 2023).

With this understanding, the subsequent sections will delve deeper into specific research questions dealing with awareness levels, participation rates, and the perceived impact of community engagement programs on undergraduate student community, drawing comparisons with the international research studies, where appropriate. This systematic review aims to synthesise research with respect to the impact of training programs in cultivating community engagement among college students and highlight the critical role of these initiatives in enhancing students' understanding of societal issues, fostering empathy, and instilling a sense of civic duty towards fellow human beings (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024). Also, this study will scrutinise the methodologies employed in assessing political awareness and civic consciousness among students using community engagement as a tool for effective outcomes for community service (Landig & Landig, 2024).

A significant body of academic literature highlights Service-Learning as a pedagogical approach that integrates community service with academic learning, thereby promoting civic engagement and critical thinking (Duarte et al., 2024). It has been acknowledged by UNESCO in 2021, emphasising that higher education institutions should actively engage with their communities to develop a new social contract for education, addressing human, social, and environmental needs through the lens of social justice and sustainable development (Aramburuzabala et al., 2024). It necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional university missions, extending beyond teaching and research to incorporate robust community service and engagement as core pillars (Amutuhaire, 2023). This strategic shift underscores the importance of actively involving students in addressing real-world problems, fostering both academic growth and civic responsibility through practical application (Gade & Opoku, 2020).

In addition to this, community-based education emphasises collaboration between students, educators, and community stakeholders to address real-world challenges, with its efficacy relying significantly on robust community partnerships and flexible curricula (Chowdhury & Alzarrad, 2025). Applying this approach contrasts with historical paradigms where higher education was often perceived as completely detached from societal needs, leading to a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application, as focusing on career pathways (Molosi-France & Dipholo, 2022). The evolution of community engagement beyond these traditional models now extends to a broader recognition of its ability to cultivate civic duty and responsibility among all stakeholders, fostering active participation in addressing societal challenges through collaborative partnerships (Sullivan, 2024). It involves a deliberate shift towards experiential learning methods that integrate academic study with practical community involvement, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of complex societal issues and the development of essential civic competencies (Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2024). The integration of academic rigour along with practical application in community involvement prepares the students not only for successful professional careers but also for being an active and informed citizens (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024).

The community engagement programs when successfully implemented, leads to such programs enabling various communities to overcome challenges such as logistical constraints, resource limitations, and ensuring sustained engagement from all stakeholders involved (Tawafak & Hinaai, 2024). Despite these challenges, the importance of effective communication and strategic planning are vital to in order to foster a mutually beneficial interaction between higher education institutions and their surrounding communities, in consideration of objectives of the university with actual community needs (Gade & Opoku, 2020). This symbiotic relationship enhances the university's societal impact and relevance, while also providing students with invaluable experiential learning opportunities (O'Dwyer et al., 2022). This study specifically aims to assess the awareness levels of undergraduate students in Mumbai regarding community engagement programs, thereby identifying current perceptions and potential barriers to participation in these initiatives (Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2024). Such an assessment is critical to forming of policy development and overall enhancements within higher education institutions to better align with the Sustainable Development Goals and foster greater civic responsibility among the student population (Castro et al., 2020).

This study hypothesises that a significant portion of undergraduate students in Mumbai may have limited awareness of available community engagement opportunities, which could impede their participation and the broader impact of these initiatives (Sultan et al., 2022).

This limited awareness could stem from inadequate dissemination strategies by universities, a lack of perceived relevance among students, or competing academic and personal priorities.

Research Methodology

The research study focusses on awareness among students of higher education institutions. To aid this endeavour, the current study will employ a quantitative method for assessing awareness insights into students' knowhow about community engagement.

Statement of Problem

The study tries to analyse various research questions as to whether undergraduates in Mumbai seem to be under-informed about community engagement work as part of their educational curricula. This understanding can make a difference between students being given the chance to develop the contemporary competencies, putting into application their theoretical knowledge in practice to all the problems they encounter in the real world and also contributing to the society in a significant manner. In addition to this, such knowledge determines the effectiveness and scope of these programs, which are designed to build skills that would make the students' an ideal citizen and bring about an all-around growth.

Significance of the Study

The study gains its importance from its ability to give deeper insights into the level of awareness among commerce students with respect to a community engagement program.

The Findings presented by this research will be of immense actionable value to various colleges and higher education institutions in Mumbai in respect of:

- Existing communication techniques to facilitate community involvement programs.
- Planning better and structured programs that could appeal to student interests and their schedule.
- Increasing student engagement in such programs thus enhancing academic as well as personal growth.
- Ensuring a strong relationship between the higher education institution and the community by making sure that programs are delivered to the targeted population.

Objectives of the Study

The research study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To measure the level of awareness of undergraduate students in Mumbai with regard to community engagement programs.
- To determine the awareness about institutional initiatives towards community engagement activities.
- To identify the participation of students in community engagement activities organised by their institution.
- To measure the awareness about the importance of community engagement activities in the curricula.

Scope of the Study

The study is limited to undergraduates from higher education institutions studying in Mumbai. It focusses on the issue of measuring the awareness about impact and effectiveness of the existing community engagement programs and their understanding about the importance of these in the curricula. The research will be done through a quantitative survey involving close-ended questionnaire.

Limitations of the Study

The research study is limited by certain aspects beyond the control of the researcher. The study uses con-

venience sampling, resulting in selection biases because the sample may not necessarily represent a full cross-section of the undergraduate students in Mumbai. In addition to this, the accuracy of the findings will depend on the self-awareness of students about community engagement initiatives. The research takes the knowledge of students at one moment in time and fails to consider any changes over time. The study doesn't consider the possibility of difference in the understanding due to various other factors viz. different terminologies used in different institutions, mis-classification of community engagement under regular curricula etc. The study limited by the sample size may not represent the views of entire student community.

Research Gap

Although the necessity of community involvement in higher education has been widely debated in the extant literature, there remains gap in the perceptions related to the degree of awareness among a self-identified group of students. This research study seeks to make an effort to fill the gap by analysing a set of quantitative data on the topic of study, which is essential to optimise institutional effort.

Data Collection

The research employs the quantitative research method, which comprises of a structured questionnaire of close-ended questions. The survey has been conducted in a manner to ensure distribution of survey and information collection from among diverse cohort of students.

Sampling and Sampling Unit

Sampling Unit: The undergraduate students from colleges in Mumbai have been taken as the sampling unit.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling has been used in this case to collect data from students.

Sample and Sample Size: The sample size is of 65 students.

Hypothesis

The research study has analysed following hypothesis for this research study:

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the awareness of community engagement programs among undergraduate students.

H_1 : There is a significant difference among the level of awareness of community engagement programs of undergraduate students.

Tools and Statistical Tests of Analysis

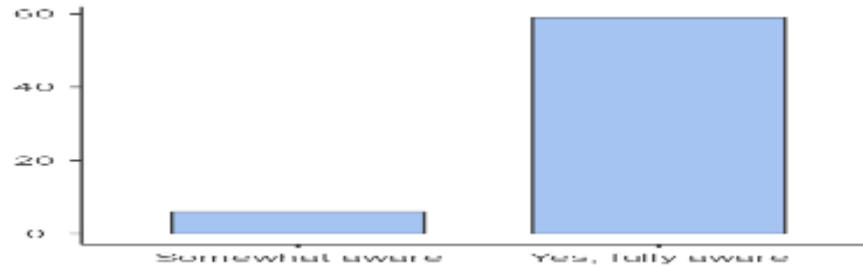
The researcher has used the chi-square test of association to assess the relationship between the gender of respondents and their responses about the research questions. Use of open-source software has been done to analyse the responses.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

An analysis of the collected data insights into the awareness and participation of students in community engagement programs. The study, with a sample size of 65 students, including 45 females and 20 males, examined the relationship between gender and several variables related to community engagement.

1. Are you aware of the concept of community engagement project in your educational curriculum?

Figure-1: Awareness of Community Engagement.



Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

Table-1: Awareness of Community Engagement.

Response	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Somewhat aware	6	9.2%	9.2%
Yes, fully aware	59	90.8%	100.0%

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

A large majority of the students (90.8%) reported being fully aware of the concept of community engagement projects in their educational curriculum. Only a small percentage (9.2%) indicated being somewhat aware.

Table-2: Chi-square test of association

Chi-square test of association		Gender		
Are you aware of the concept of community engagement project in your educational curriculum?		Female	Male	Total
Somewhat aware		3	3	6
Yes, fully aware		42	17	59
Total		45	20	65

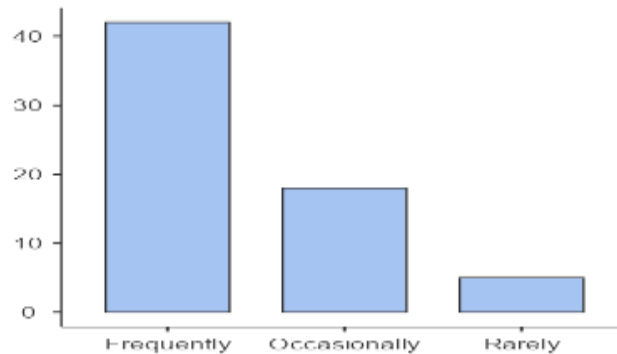
χ^2 Tests			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	1.15	1	0.284
N	65		

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

A chi-square test for awareness showed that 59 students were fully aware of the concept, while 6 were only somewhat aware. However, the chi-square value of 1.15 and a p-value of 0.284 indicate no statistically significant relationship between gender and awareness.

2. How often does your institution organise activities related to community engagement?

Figure-2: Community Engagement activities organised by institutions.



Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

Table-3: Community Engagement activities organised by institutions.

Response	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Frequently	42	64.6%	64.6%
Occasionally	18	27.7%	92.3%
Rarely	5	7.7%	100.0%

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

The majority of students (64.6%) perceive their institution as organising community engagement activities frequently. A significant portion (27.7%) reported these activities occurring occasionally, while a smaller group (7.7%) felt they happen rarely.

Table-4: Chi-square test of association

Chi-square test of association		Gender		
How often does your institution organise activities related to community engagement?		Female	Male	Total
Frequently		28	14	42
Occasionally		13	5	18
Rarely		4	1	5
Total		45	20	65

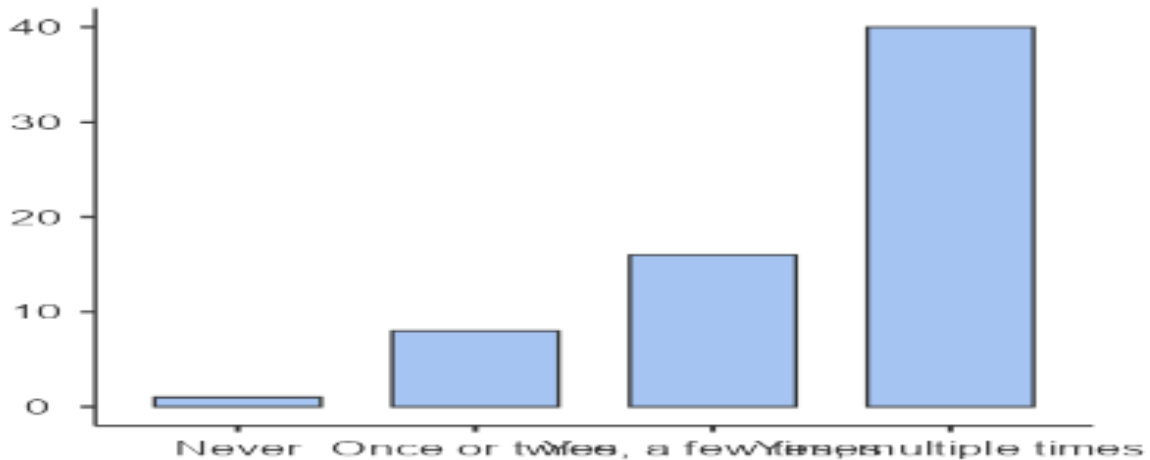
χ^2 Tests			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	0.477	2	0.788
N	65		

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected

An analysis of frequency in institutions organising activities related to community engagement revealed that 42 students perceived that their institution organised activities frequently, while 18 said occasionally and 5 said rarely. The chi-square value of 0.477 and a p-value of 0.788 confirmed there was no significant association between gender and this perception.

3. Have you participated in any community engagement activities organised by your institution?

Figure-3: Participation of students in Community Engagement activities.



Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

Table-5: Participation of students in Community Engagement activities.

Response	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Never	1	1.5%	1.5%
Once or twice	8	12.3%	13.8%
Yes, a few times	16	24.6%	38.5%
Yes, multiple times	40	61.5%	100.0%

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

A substantial majority of students (61.5%) have participated in community engagement activities organised by their institution multiple times. Another 24.6% have participated a few times. Only a small percentage reported participating once or twice (12.3%) or never (1.5%).

Table-6: Chi-square test of association

Chi-square test of association		Gender		
Have you participated in any community engagement activities organised by your institution?		Female	Male	Total
Never		1	0	1
Once or twice		8	0	8
Yes, a few times		9	7	16
Yes, multiple times		27	13	40
Total		45	20	65

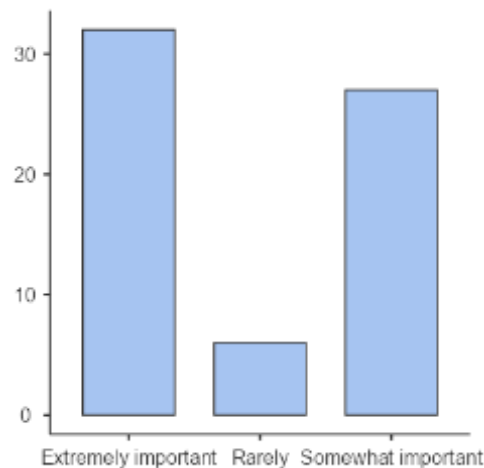
χ^2 Tests			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	5.32	3	0.150
N	65		

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

In case of participation in any community engagement activities organised by your institution, the majority of students (i.e. 40) had participated for multiple times, while only 1 had never participated. The table shows a higher number of female students reporting multiple participations compared to male students (i.e. 27 vs. 13). Despite this, the chi-square test with a value of 5.32 and a p-value of 0.150 indicated no statistically significant relationship between gender and participation levels.

4. Do you think community engagement is important for students?

Figure-4: Importance of Community Engagement activities.



Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

Table-7: Importance of Community Engagement activities.

Response	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Extremely important	32	49.2%	49.2%
Rarely	6	9.2%	58.5%
Somewhat important	27	41.5%	100.0%

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

The vast majority of students think that students should be involved in the community. 41.5% think it is somewhat important, and 49.2% think it is extremely important. It's interesting that the response option Rarely has been represented by 9.2% of the responses. These responses are the ones, who have not been able to grasp the community engagement in their curriculum.

Table-8: Chi-square test of association

Chi-square test of association		Gender		
Do you think community engagement is important for students?		Female	Male	Total
Extremely important		23	9	32
Rarely		4	2	6
Somewhat important		18	9	27
Total		45	20	65

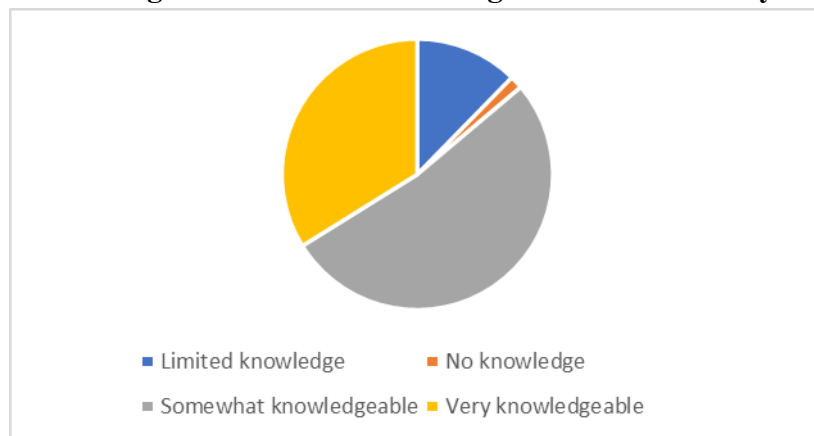
χ^2 Tests			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	0.207	2	0.902
N	65		

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

The investigation into the students' perception of the importance of community engagement revealed that 32 students considered it extremely important, while 27 thought it was somewhat important, and 6 rated it as rarely important. The chi-square value of 0.207 and a p-value of 0.902 showed no significant relationship between gender and the students' perception of the importance of community engagement.

5. How would you rate your current level of knowledge about community engagement?

Figure-5: Level of knowledge about Community Engagement activities.



Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

Table-9: Level of knowledge about Community Engagement activities.

Response	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Limited knowledge	8	12.3%	12.3%
No knowledge	1	1.5%	13.8%
Somewhat knowledgeable	34	52.3%	66.2%
Very knowledgeable	22	33.8%	100.0%

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

The majority of students perceive their knowledge about community engagement as either somewhat knowledgeable (52.3%) or very knowledgeable (33.8%). A smaller portion reported having limited knowledge (12.3%) or no knowledge (1.5%).

Table-10: Chi-square test of association

Chi-square test of association		Gender		
How would you rate your current level of knowledge about community engagement?		Female	Male	Total
Limited knowledge		5	3	8

No knowledge	1	0	1
Somewhat knowledgeable	22	12	34
Very knowledgeable	17	5	22
Total	45	20	65

χ^2 Tests			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	1.61	3	0.657
N	65		

Source: Prepared by researcher from primary data collected.

The analysis of students' self-rated knowledge about community engagement showed that 34 were somewhat knowledgeable, and 22 were very knowledgeable. The corresponding chi-square value of 1.61 and a p-value of 0.657 confirmed that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and the students' perceived knowledge level.

Findings

The study suggests a high level of awareness about community engagement as a part of their education curriculum among the surveyed students. It indicates that the institutions actively organise community engagement initiatives and activities, with further room for improvement in making them more participative for all the students. The research study also suggests a good level of student involvement in the community engagement activities offered by the institutions. Also, it was observed that there is a strong consensus among students regarding the significance of community engagement in their overall education. Another important observation is that, a good number of students feel knowledgeable, however, there is still a considerable segment that perceives their understanding as limited, suggesting potential areas for further awareness initiatives. The consistent lack of a significant relationship in chi-square tests across all variables suggests that, within this sample, gender does not play a determining role in a student's awareness, perception, or participation in community engagement programs.

Conclusion

Students in Mumbai show a high level of awareness about community engagement being part of their curriculum. The institutions have been frequently organising community engagement activities in which significant number of students have participated multiple times in those activities. Also, there is a strong agreement among students about the importance of having community engagement activities in their education curriculum; which explains their self-confidence in rating their current level of knowledge about community engagement, wherein they have rated themselves to be somewhat knowledgeable to very knowledgeable. The findings provide a positive initial outlook on the state of community engagement among the surveyed students in Mumbai. However, further analysis using the other questions in your survey and appropriate statistical tests will be needed to address your specific research objectives and hypotheses.

Suggestions

The suggestions have been framed by the observations made in this study and have been detailed as below:

- Improve visibility of community engagement programs in higher education institutions
- Development of course structures in a manner to integrate community engagement activities in experiential or practical component.
- Allocate resources for community engagement programs in order to developing soft skills and responsiveness to societal issues in the communities in vicinity.
- Incentivise the students with significant credit allocation for community engagement activities to build empathetic leaders of future.

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