

# Service Learning and Community Engagement in Community Colleges in Saudi Arabia

Rubina Liyakat Khan, Navdeep Kaur Dandiwal, Deepa Priyanshu

**Abstract:** Student engagement and service learning has turned into an important part of the community colleges' discussions about effective educational run through and students accomplishment as the institution includes engagement within its strategic plan. Service learning offers an exceptional prospect to engage students in community service, to develop their educational agenda and to construct mutual partnerships within the community. Community engaged teaching can present unique and sometimes knotty challenges for which many are not equipped. Although, serving community is an important objective in higher education, but in most of developing countries, the process of development is slow to meet local needs and challenges of and globalization. The paper aims to understand what is Academic service learning and Community Engagement. The opportunities and challenges faced by the community services have been identified and the solutions have been proposed. Few guidelines have been suggested in the end to implement service learning in Diploma Program.

**Keywords** — Service Learning, Community Engagement, Community Service, Diploma program, Community College, Challenges, opportunities, recommendations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has imposed demands on universities to break their isolation from community and society needs, especially with increased globalization which has contributed to more openness of all the universities in the world. Altbach (2004) indicated that modern technology, the internet, the increasing ease of communication and the flow of students and highly educated personnel across borders enhances globalization, where no academic system can exist by itself in the world of the 21st century. Therefore, many universities and government agencies established technical and community colleges to meet the needs of local markets and provide economic, cultural and social transformations and technical support for the community in order to provide better services to societies.

Saudi universities were aware of the importance of community colleges not only to meet the needs of labor market.

But the issue of existing gap between universities and labor market still exist, and this is not only for the case of Saudi Arabia, but also for the most of universities in the Arab World. Universities have valuable resources (for example student, faculty, staff, classroom, libraries, technology, research expertise etc) that become accessible to the community when partnership address community needs. They also have a tradition of serving their communities by strengthening the economic development of the region, addressing educational needs of the community and contributing to the cultural life of the community. Emphasizing the value of community involvement and community service can also create a culture of service in campus. Service learning can be viewed as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity to gain further understanding of course content.

Service Learning links ideas developed in the classroom and their practical application within the community through guided manifestation. It is an approach which is designed to develop and enrich student learning of course material. It claims to link coursework to life experiences, career exploration and employment opportunities. In helping student to develop skills, it may build up self esteem, that comes from achieving something that is demanding, and self confidence as well as relate personal development to civic responsibility. Traditional modes of teaching do not address these matters and consequently do not make an impact on many of the students. Students are more impressed by their experience that take place outside the colleges. Application of service learning pedagogy seems to be effective alternative strategy to make the student learn value change, choice, capabilities, cooperation, collaboration, compromise, connectedness in the program curriculum.

With the increase in the number of students taking part in service learning programs as a part of higher education experience, there is a need to study the effect, challenges of service learning on student development. To develop social competences in Community colleges, experience should be provided with arranging diverse community services enabling students from different programs to get familiar with the needs and expectations of the society. Various conducts in which the universities engage communities could vary from through teaching and learning, social and cultural engagement, sponsoring resources for community use, partnering with local businesses to provide graduate training, integrating civic responsibility in curriculum design, researching social sustainability and well-being and organizing public forums on social issues.

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The positive impact as well as challenges of service learning, from the perspective of the students, faculty, universities and community partners, has been reported in a number of previous studies. As most service learning courses require significant communications outside the classroom, a major challenge facing educators is maintaining student engagement on the relevant social issues. A service surrounding may distract students during the learning process, or they may feel overwhelmed by the work and fail to recognize valuable learning opportunities. As a consequence, educators frequently find it difficult to quantify the impact of service learning or to determine the extent to which learning objectives are fulfilled.

### History of Community Colleges in Saudi Arabia

It is not intended in this study to have detailed history of community colleges in Saudi Arabia or in the Arab World, but to give some Ideas about the start of community colleges. The first community college was established in in 1976 ,as two year junior teacher colleges, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, which prepare high school graduates to teach elementary schools and upgraded to four year colleges to provide better teacher for elementary schools. The first two year technical college was considered community colleges established in 1983 and was under the supervision of General Presidency of Technical Education and Training. AL Maree(2011) indicated that technical colleges face problems where gradates did not acquire skill needed in English and low practice in their programs., and these colleges cannot provide consultation for the local community. Although, there is increase in numbers and quality of these colleges but their participation in labor market was limited . The major development of community colleges came as part of fulfillment of government plans to expand community colleges to meet the need of labor market which mainly depends on non-Saudi citizens. Some colleges established more than one community college ,and the number reached 50 community colleges. Since education is separate for boys and girls in Saudi Arabia ,there is a separate community colleges for girls which also similar for community colleges for boys. The organization of most of the community colleges are similar in most Arab countries, the difference exists in major fields of study (Turki,1984).Bobtana and Moawad( 1985) stated the objectives of establishing Community colleges in the Arab World as follows:

- 1- to meet great demands of societies on higher education in all Arab countries.
- 2- to provide equal opportunities for access to higher education .
- 3- to meet the need for development and diversification of higher education.
- 4- to introduce new tasks for higher education to serve the community.

There is no difference between these objectives and the objectives for establishing community colleges in Saudi Arabia, but the number of community colleges in a large geographic area such Saudi Arabia (with 50 community colleges) is below the number needed for the development of labor market. This background has implication that community colleges should be innovated and expanded to meet needs of local communities in a large geographic area such as Saudi Arabia.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Service is defined as “voluntary work intended to help people in a particular area” or “unpaid work, intended to be a social use”(Google Dictionary 2019). Academic service learning is a teaching and learning methodology where students participate in meaningful and structured activities that meet recognized community needs and reflect on the service activity to achieve further understanding of course content and an enhanced sense of community accountability. Service Learning is defined by the Corporation on National and Community Service as a method through which citizenship, academic subjects skills and values are taught. It involves active learning including drawing lessons from the experience of performing service work. Service-learning allows students the opportunity to practice critical thinking skills and apply learning in real-world settings, while meeting authentic needs in communities. Service-learning presents students with real-world problems to confront, alternatives to consider, and solutions to find. Service-learning challenges students to work collegially, communicate successfully, and acquire and exercise new skills. Research has indicated that service-learning has had a positive impact on academic, social, and cultural variables (Butin, 2006). It increases understanding and depth of course content, promotes knowledge and understanding of civic and social issues, and increases awareness and acceptance of diversity (Astin & Sax, 1998; Billig et al., 2005; Chang, 2002; Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, & Associates, 2005; Hamm & Houck, 1998). Service-learning may be included in college and university courses as a separate course with a focus on service-learning (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001) or as strategy for teaching academic concepts in disciplines such as engineering (George & Shams, 2007; Mehta & Sukumaran, 2007; Zhang, Gartner, Gunes, & Ting, 2007), education (Chen, 2004; Swick & Rowls, 2000), and nursing (Romack, 2004).Research shows that the relationship created between the student and the community organization encourages more involvement in current social issues and ignites a need to be actively democratic(Anson, 1997; Deans, 1999; Dorman & Fox Dorman, 1997; Dubinsky, 2006). According to Gray et al. (2000), service learning encourages students to stay “informed about social and political issues, voting and participating in governance in other ways, and developing a sense of personal responsibility to their community and nation”. Even though this can be demanding on a student, research shows that students enjoy service learning. One study reported 80% of 1,000 students surveyed found service learning to be a positive experience, having helped them better comprehend academic material (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

**Definitions :** Universities around the world have developed diverse definitions and associated activities of community service. States, In the United States, there is an official national definition of community service, which is spelled out in U.S. federal laws. This definition, which is taken from the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Higher Education Amendments of 1992, and the Higher Education Technical Amendments of 1993, is given below.



*Services which are identified by an institution of higher education, through formal or informal consultation with local non-profit, governmental, and community-based organizations, as designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, particularly low-income individuals, or to solve particular problems related to their needs.*

The University of Wisconsin-Madison defines community service as: “volunteering with a community agency, department or non-profit, in order to contribute to the common good.” California State University, Chico, defines community service as “any work provided by individuals that contributes to the quality of life in the community.” According to Missouri State University, Springfield “community service is done without monetary compensation and is done most often for non-profit agencies rather than for-profit businesses.”

In Australia, the University of South Australia (2012) defines community service as activities which are mutually beneficial to the University and the community, such as leadership positions in professional organizations, appointments to government boards, and service to community-serving organizations. Monash University’s (2012) definition of community service includes “cultural, economic, environmental, scientific, social and other activities and programs that involve interaction with individuals, groups and organisations external to Monash and contribute to the progress and development of those groups.” Many definitions are offered by different service learning initiatives. For this study, the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2012) definition will be used. It states that service learning is a “teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (para. 1). Service learning incorporates service and learning through community service advancing interpersonal and academic growth. However, Bringle and Hatcher manipulate this definition for college purposes stating that service learning is “a course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility” (as cited in Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 38).

### Theoretical Framework

In real-life environment can instigate such exploratory action. According to Dewey (1938), reflection is an essential tool as part of this real-life experience; students should ponder their encounter and “extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experience” In other words, new experiences should build upon old experiences, creating continuity of intellectual growth and stimulation. However, the experience itself must provoke thought. Adding to Dewey’s thoughts on experience, Kolb (1984) believes that learning is a continual process incorporating an experience between a person and the environment. Kolb (1984) claims that the experience will not necessarily create learning within the individual:

*The central idea here is that learning, and therefore knowing, requires both a grasp or figurative representation of experience and some transformation of that representation. The simple perception of experience is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it. Transformation alone cannot represent learning, for there must be something to be transformed, some state or experience that is being acted upon.*

Kolb is best known for his four-stage learning cycle that incorporates the use of experience within the learning process. The first stage is the concrete stage where the student performs the endeavor; the second stage is called reflective observation, which incorporates reflection; the third stage is abstract conceptualization, which the student theorizes about what he/she just experienced; and the fourth stage, active experimentation, is when the student actually sets forth to check his/her theory. Kolb’s (1984) philosophy discusses the domain of service learning, promoting it as part of experiential learning, as it includes human experiences and creates “living systems of inquiry” (p. 121). His belief, and Dewey’s (1916, 1933, 1938) philosophy, are truly emphasized in the concept of service learning, where the student connects with the experience and is guided throughout the process to reflect upon the meaning of service. Vygotsky’s (1978) exploratory educational concepts add to the model of service learning. Though his research focused mainly on the knowledge of children, this concept can be applied to service learning. In fact, by emphasizing that adults will learn from each other, this internal knowledge then transfers into progression. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development theory, a person can produce and learn more through social interaction. As experiential learning continues to increase in popularity, many colleges have implemented service learning into their curriculum and extra-curricular activities (Johnson & Notah, 1999; Kolb, 1984). In particular, service learning, falling under the umbrella of experiential learning, has become more significant at colleges and universities within the last 15 years (Campus Compact, 2005; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Zlotkowski, 2000). President Bush, Sr. pushed for service learning in education by signing the National and Community Service Act of 1990. President Clinton followed by signing the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, funding Ameri Corps and Learn and Serve America (Kozeracki, 2000).

Individuals new to service learning may have a difficult time understanding the difference between service learning and volunteering. Both activities involve individuals donating their time to a nonprofit organization. However, with volunteering, there is no educational objective. When including service learning into the curriculum, there is structure, direction, and evaluation that volunteering usually does not involve (Waterman, 1997). When service learning is incorporated into the college curriculum, it can be a one-time project where a student dedicates a certain amount of required time at a nonprofit agency. A second option is when service learning is offered as a separate credit course focusing on service learning content. The third option is through an extracurricular activity where the student may or may not receive credit for their volunteer activities (Witmer & Anderson,



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1994; Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, & Greschwind, 2000). Community colleges commonly generally follow the first format comprising a graded in-class activity. In 1982, King Saud University established the first deanship of Community Service and Continuing education in Saudi Arabia. The deanship focused on community service setting the trend for other universities to follow. Today, most of the Saudi Universities have organizational units that have the same name "Deanship of Community Service and Continuing Education. In spite of these efforts, there is a lack of a formal and correct definition of community service and associated university activities. Conference proceedings published by Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University (1998) indicated that community service in Saudi universities is largely limited to training and continuing education activities. The Unified Guidelines for Faculty Members at Saudi Universities, issued by the Higher Education Council (1998), give no definition of community service. Item 38 of these guidelines requires faculty members to actively participate in activities of the department, college, and university for the service of the community. There is no definition or further detail of what community service activities may include. Individual Saudi universities may have their own community service details for example:-

- Hold an exhibition
- Present a lecture
- Organize workshop
- Conduct Community Scientific Research
- Request Field Visit
- Request Consultation services
- Request Volunteers

-Utilize the university's facilities to hold a seminar, conference, forum or workshop.  
Features of Saudi community Colleges :

**Table 1:** Features of Saudi Community Colleges

Source : Collection of previous Studies and websites of community colleges

### SWOT Analysis :

**Table 2:** SWOT Analysis of Community Colleges

The strengths of community colleges	The weakness of community colleges
To free universities to focus on qualitative aspects of their programs	Community colleges accept students with low average who cannot get admission to the main universities
To help public universities to attract students with higher grades , while students with low grades enroll in community colleges	Many students Complained about the lack of applied courses in college programs
Participation of Community colleges to	Provide an access to students with low grades

Community colleges programs range from two to three years	There are two tracks , one professional education to lead to labor market And the other lead to the university
Admission requires a high school degree of certain average	the college offers diploma certificate for the track of the labor market, and the other track to be accepted to the university
Most of community colleges are owned and supervised by the government.	Majors and Programs are limited for meeting labor market needs
The college offer training programs. Programs are offered meet some needs of community	Courses offered: computer and information technology, management, network technology, Database management, development of database applications, Web development technology, marketing, insurance, Office management, system analysis.
Students enroll in community colleges because they cannot be enrolled at the university ,	Strong academic advising.
Study at community colleges are more flexible than university	The student may not lose units of study when transferred in the same specialization for community colleges have the same system.

some extent in labor market	to higher education.
Provide an access to students with low grades to higher education	Most of community colleges have similar programs regardless of the differences of local community needs
Community colleges (as part of the universities) have access to use laboratories of the universities for various disciplines	Programs were not designed to meet the needs of communities
Opportunity for community colleges	Challenges facing community colleges
Community colleges have great support from university Leaders	Rapid changes in scientific and technical progress in the world
The development plans in Saudi Arabia support expansion in community colleges to meet labor market need.	Centralized system of education, procedures and legislation limit the progress of the development of these colleges.

Local development is needed in Saudi Arabia	Employers are not keen to employ community colleges graduates, despite the needs of skilled labor.
There is a demand for skilled labor below college level.	Labor market needs new and diverse skills.

SWOT analysis shows that the community colleges face weakness in their internal programs for the lack of application of theory into practice, the similarity of their programs which did not incorporate local needs of surrounding communities, and these programs lack of practical application of what is learned. The enrollment of most of students in these colleges is not by their choice or interest, but because they could not be admitted by the university, so they enroll in these community colleges.

IAU portal defines community service as “A platform that provides the community the opportunity to seek out community services that are available within the university’s resources and hence, reduce the processing time to deliver it”. Community service participates in the relatively small proportion or have no community experience with best gain on superficial knowledge from textbooks. In practice, majority of the time is used in taking lectures and activities in facilities remote from the community. The students gets engaged in the curricular or extra curricular activities mostly within the college considering it to be the community service , rather than providing the benefit of the activities to the community. Most of such activities conducted in reality inside the colleges are listed in the figure below:-

**Table 3:** List of Community Services /Service Learning activities offered in Community Colleges in Saudi Arabia

1	Lecture Presentation	11	Voluntary off campus activities
2	Organizing workshop	12	Public Lectures
3	Providing a training on various software.	13	Links with Community Institutions
4	Organizing social and cultural events	14	Graduation projects for the community
5	Holding an Exhibition	15	Trainings done by students
6	Field Visit	16	Donating things
7	Short courses	17	Recycling the digital waste
8	Curricular activities	18	Raising funds for the community
9	Consultation services		
10	Awareness Campaigns		

In Community College, IAU the faculty responsible for conducting community service, needs to follow a procedure. The faculty needs to register the activity online by mentioning the title of the activity, type of the activity, venue, date and time of the activity, beneficiaries, required budget community partners(if any). The activity needs approval

from the finance department to be conducted. The faculty needs to maintain the list of students involved in the activity to assess the student on the basis of their participation. Till now this assessment is not a part of the curriculum to fulfill the learning outcomes of the program. The Key performance indicator Analysis of the last three year in community service done, at Community College, IAU is as mentioned in. In this Indicator the proportion is calculated for:-

**Formula :-**

$$\frac{\text{number of full time teaching staff and other staff actively participate in community service activity}}{\text{the no. of full time teaching and other staff is calculated.}}$$

**Challenges**

Referring the analysis, it can be identified that there are some unseen challenges that could be the reason of the decrease in the actual benchmark achieved. Some of the challenges and possible solutions could be

**A. Time Commitment**

One of the major concern that students and faculties express about community involved teaching and research is that it takes a lot of valuable time. Certainly, it takes considerable amounts of time to develop a productive working association with a community partner, to design projects that meet both learning and community goals, to administer the projects as they clarify, to engage students in special skills training, and to echo on the meaningfulness of projects with students.

**B. Lack of motivation for the students**

Even though serving the community is a significant part of programs Learning outcomes in Community College program, the Community service participation is not the part of the grading distribution of the Diploma program in Community College, the students found less motivated considering it not the part of their courses assessment method.

**C. Ensuring Student Learning**

Another common concern is that students will not be set well enough to accomplish a community-based project successfully and that this will bound the learning experience in helping their community associate. While failure can happen in any teaching setting, the responsibility faculty and students may feel to community associate can make that viewpoint more bothersome. It is therefore important to ensure students have all the grounding needed to succeed in their projects and to benefit from the learning experience that community engagement provides.

**D. Lack of emphasis and motivation for Faculties**

Community service is not highlighted as a role alike teaching and research. This is mirrored in the faculty annual evaluations and their promotion requirements only. Community service by faculty members is largely observed as inner university service.



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This prevailing outlook is due to the evaluation and promotion system that chiefly describes community service as university inner administrative and committee work.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome the challenges faced by the faculty and the students, some possible solutions for effective community service could be:-

- i. Centres for teaching and learning offer many resources to assist you in efficiently planning community-based courses that have a high impact on students and the community. Because each course and community project can be unique, the most useful service is usually a one-on-one consultation.
- ii. Rely on community service offices to bridge the gap between campus and community. The fellow educators and the institution's public service centres can help to develop meaningful partnerships more efficiently. Thus they can help make the planning much easier and help establish a positive working relationship between college and the community partner. They also may be able to assist with services such as campus vans or other logistical necessities that your course may require.
- iii. Setting realistic project goals that are manageable for students within the time frame of their course. Further, it is important to communicate these goals clearly to the students and ensure they have a clear sense of what will be expected of them at every step in the course.
- iv. Students should be motivated to participate in the community service so as to get working experience with in their curriculum. Community partners can be excited to have students working with them on new and valued projects, and they may have high hopes about what they can accomplish. While this enthusiasm is important for developing a good partnership, it is important to ensure your partner knows exactly what capacities your students do and do not have, and to set realistic expectations for project goals.
- v. For the greatest synergy between learning and service tasks, and for the greatest chance of project success, it is important to weave the project thoroughly into the content of the class. It is therefore helpful to provide students with course content – readings, lectures, discussions – that develop their knowledge of community issues and their understanding of relevant theoretical perspectives. When possible, it is helpful to have community partners suggest useful readings, provide a guest lecture, or participate in class dialogue.
- vi. Students may benefit from an orientation to the project and the community with their community partner, whether it is off campus or in a guest lecture. This helps to provide students with an introduction to the community and the project goals, and better understand the synergies that exist between service and learning goals. It also can help the students to make the community partner less abstract and enhance their sense of accountability to the project, serving as an important motivation for student performance throughout the course.

- vii. Students may have the motivation and knowledge to complete a successful project, but if logistical difficulties such as scheduling, transportation, or communications mount, success is less likely. Therefore it is important to provide students with the resources they need and that they are using them effectively.
- viii. To ensure students are progressing towards the project's learning and service goals, it is important to assign relevant readings and assess their progress through tests, reports, oral presentations, or other assignments. If the project is substantial, it is helpful to assign its component pieces throughout the course so that students gradually build towards the final result with important comments and corrections along the way.
- ix. Establish a community service centre in each Saudi university. This centre will be responsible for the coordination of all activities and services designed to benefit the community and help the institution succeed in its outreach efforts.

### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has described the Academic service learning and the community service and also presented the challenges faced by the faculty and students to conduct the community services in diploma program in Community College, IAU. The benchmarking of community service for the last 3 years has been analyzed and possible solutions have been proposed aiming to improve the community service activities. The recommendations of the study are realistic and relatively easy to implement. Real-world service learning experiences have the potential to induce far-reaching change in students and to produce a paradigm shift in life and career experiences. To foster reflective learning and new knowledge, the course introduced assessment tools such as the logbook and group project, which are grounded in the transformative learning theory. The faculty also intends to explore opportunities for integrating service learning in other academic courses. The study revealed that in order for community colleges to be active in the development, they should be free from any management constraints that usually imposed on these colleges either by universities or by any central agencies. The objective of the service learning is to provide a framework to innovate and expand community roles. The study outlined general requirement for the importance and significance of service learning, these requirements may be applicable to any developing country after fitting these requirements for their needs. With time, the community service among Saudi youth appears to be gaining ground across Saudi Arabia. A better coordination between the administration and the students to help motivate the students facilitates their community work. Different ways of community service could be identified by the students to help people differently in the way they like.

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