

Article

Attitude of Stakeholders towards the Institutionalisation of Service-Learning: Perceived Threats and Opportunities in Indian Christian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Anchored in experiential learning, the present study investigates the stakeholders' attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning in selected Catholic higher education institutions in India.

Adopting a descriptive survey design, data were collected from four institutions where service-learning is actively practiced, using appropriate tools. Results showed that administrators had unfavourable attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service- learning. Interestingly, an equal number of teachers and students reported both favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning. Major threats to the institutionalisation of service-learning reported were the lack of funds and resources, and the unavailability of space, time and accessibility. Among the opportunities availed by the stakeholders were: the possibility to bring about community change and transformation; the chance to plan and apply concepts in real-world settings; exposure to field experts' perspectives on course content; increased awareness of one's capabilities and uniqueness; and the development of intra- and interpersonal skills. The results of this study underscore the need for structured policy initiatives, stakeholder engagement, and institutional commitment to successfully integrate service-learning

into higher education curricula. It recommends ongoing orientation programs, curriculum inclusion, financial and logistical support, and active stakeholder participation to overcome existing barriers. By addressing these challenges and leveraging identified opportunities, institutions can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of service-learning programs. Future research should broaden the geographic scope, incorporate community perspectives, and employ longitudinal studies to assess the evolving impact of service-learning on higher education and society.

Keywords

Attitude, Stakeholders, Institutionalisation of Service-learning, Perceived threats and opportunities, Higher Education Institutions, Descriptive survey.

Introduction

The history of service-learning (SL) in India is young. However, its essence was always prevalent in the Gurukula system of education in the form of 'shramdaan' wherein the term 'shraam' meant labour and 'daan' meant donation. Following the Guru-shishya Parampara, the shishya would render their services to the guru and his family; and the nearby community. In the Vedic traditions the term 'shramdaan' literarily translates to 'voluntary contribution of service' (Shram Dhan – ॐ तत् सत्, n.d.).

Here, individuals gathered together to contribute their time, energy and labour for a common good, like cleaning public spaces, organizing an event, etc., thereby improving and strengthening community life. With the advent of British rule in India education was classroom oriented aimed at preparing cheap labour to serve the colonial administration. Realizing the perils of such a socially alienated education system, Mahatma Gandhi was the first to ideate the need of social service on the part of students involving their head, heart, and hand. Post-independence, the National Service Scheme (NSS) was introduced in 1969 by University Grants Commission (UGC) headed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan with the motto of 'Not Me, But You' wherein an NSS volunteer places 'community' before 'self'. In the spirit of service-learning, NSS as a program aimed to instil among its volunteers the skill and temperament to understand their community, identify and address its needs, foster and develop their sense of social responsibility, creativity and willingness to apply knowledge to solve problems, skill to mobilise community participation, build leadership qualities and democratic values, and prepare them for emergencies and disasters. (National Service Scheme, n.d.). NSS is still a part of the Indian secondary and tertiary education system today.

Since the history of institutionalisation of service-learning in India has not been documented it is difficult to specifically mention the chronology of its evolution. However, in a report published by Christ University, Bangalore it was noted that Lady Doak College (LDC), Madurai had introduced service-learning in the form of evaluative and non -evaluative service programs in 1978. In 2001, LDC initiated the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), NSS, Youth Red Cross, and Library Service Program. In 2003-04, a few departments such as Economics, Zoology and Sociology started a service-learning program. In 2004-05 LDC institutionalized the service-learning program (Centre for Social Action, Christ University, Bengaluru, 2016). The Loyola College in Chennai has a Department of service-learning. Further, St. Xaviers College in Palayamkottai, American College, St. Joseph College and Holy Cross College at Trichy, Arul Anandar College at Karumathur, Christ University in Bangalore, Scottish Church College at Kolkotta, Mahindra College at Maharashtra, and St. Edmunds College at Shillong, are some of the educational institutions which provide service-learning.

Service-learning has also been institutionalised in many engineering and technical institutions in India since the signing of a non-binding memorandum of understanding between universities, including Engineering Projects in Community Service (EPICS) in the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering

(IEEE) and EPICS Purdue on April 6, 2018 (*Educational collaboration with India, 2018*).

At Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU), service-learning has existed in the form of community engagement. Prajjwal was a forum formed by the management students way back in 2010 to cater to the educational needs of the nearby school students belonging to the low-income group by organising educational workshops every Sunday for two hours. Further, the Prajjwal team also used to conduct memory tests, art and drawing competitions, opportunities to perform on stage, observing important events and celebrating festivals, and interaction with renowned personalities to boost the morale of the students. This was followed by the introduction of the Community Engagement Programme- Swastyayan in 2013, a social commitment project by ADBU. The programme catered to the educational needs of high school students, career growth programmes, etc. (Swastyayan, n.d.). However, the journey of Service- Learning began in Autumn 2019, followed by the Teachers' Capacity Building Programme conducted by Prof. Suzanne Walfoort and Prof. Andrew Carlson. During the period 2020-21, four steps were taken:

Step 1: Every Department developed a SL course.

Step 2: Department SL faculty in charge was nominated,

Step 3: SL orientation for students was conducted, and

Step 4: 200 hours of SL was made compulsory for all students.

In 2020, the University collaborated with Uniservitate, a programme for the promotion of solidarity service-learning in catholic higher education institutions , which supported the institutionalisation of SL into ADBU. ADBU was initiated as a member of the

Asia and Oceania Hub. The Assam Don Bosco University launched its service-learning programme and was also integrated into the global network of Uniservitate in Asia on 15th September 2021. Supported by the Uniservitate programme the Service-learning Fellowship Programme for students was launched on 22nd July 2021. Out of 47 submitted proposals, only 5 were shortlisted, which were completed and awarded. Service-learning has become a mandatory course to be fulfilled by both UG (200 hrs) and PG (180 hrs) students to earn their degrees. Further fulfilling the requirement of community engagement as required by the four-year undergraduate course in its first and second semesters, the University, in its academic council decided to continue with the 200 hours of service-learning.

The University Grants Commission's document 'Guidelines for Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in India 2.0' (2022) mentioned service-learning as a model to provide students with opportunities to apply their discipline-specific knowledge in solving challenges of specific communities (p. 4). So, though confined to a majority of catholic institutions, service-learning has been recognised as an effective pedagogy to link classroom learning to real-world needs.

In light of a gradual recognition of service-learning as an effective model to foster social responsibility among the upcoming citizens of the country, the researchers decided to carry out the present study focused on the 'institutionalisation of service-learning'. The research team aimed to measure stakeholders' attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning in their higher education institutions.

> **"Attitude is an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective, and behavioural information" (Maio, Haddock, & Verplanken, 2019, p.23)."**

Thus, attitude is an individual's judgement or evaluation of abstract or concrete objects or phenomena based on their experiences. Attitudes are important because they affect the cognition and behaviour of an individual. However, behaviour too influences one's attitude. A positive attitude encourages effort, while a negative attitude discourages it. Therefore, attitudes are not static but can be shaped by various strategies including traditions, beliefs and context.

The institutionalisation of service-learning is a complex process influenced by multiple factors and work ethics of the stakeholders such as the administrators, teachers, students, and community members. The institutionalisation of service-learning is not a one-day affair and takes time to get immersed into the institutional core. According to Furco (1998), institutionalisation is a process with three stages:

The first stage is "the critical mass building stage" where the different stakeholders within the institution—management, department heads, faculty members, and the students—are beginning to recognise SL and are embracing the idea and its implementation strategies.

The second stage is "the quality building stage" where the stakeholders focus on improving the quality of service-learning, fine-tuning it according to the ideal models. This stage is achieved by consistent monitoring and evaluation of the process of SL, and implementing the lessons learnt.

The third stage is "the sustained institutionalisation stage" wherein service-learning has become part of the institutional culture. Even newcomers get naturally inducted into the process. Service-learning has the necessary resources at its disposal: infrastructural, human, and financial.

To be institutionalised at the level of the institution, it will require the involvement of the Head of the institution for its incorporation into

the institution's mission statement, development of policies, allocation of budget, and providing support to the staff and students for the implementation and continuous assessment of service-learning. Institutionalisation of service-learning at the level of the faculty will require the development of the service-learning course and curriculum, faculty development activities, faculty expectations for rewards and recognition, support and understanding for each other, and undertaking service-learning focused research. For students, institutionalisation includes the availability of scholarships for service and service-learning, the provision of service-learning courses and options for earning credit, fostering a student culture that values service, and the availability of co-curricular transcripts that formally document service activities. Lastly, institutionalisation at the level of the community occurs when resources from community agencies are combined with institutional resources to establish enduring, mutually beneficial partnerships that support both community interests and academic goals (Selvam, 2023).

Since stakeholders play a pivotal role in institutionalising SL, Stakeholders' motivation to work for service-learning is much affected by their attitude towards the institutionalisation of service-learning. Stakeholders will display service-learning favourable behaviour only when they have a favourable attitude towards it and its institutionalisation. At times, individuals will not be aware of the attitudes that they hold and its unconscious effects on behaviour. The relationship between attitude and behaviour is well explained by Fishbein and Azjen's (1975) 'Theory of Reasoned Action' which states that the immediate predictor of individuals' behaviour is their intention. The intention is further influenced by one's attitude towards the behaviour (i.e., whether one thinks performing the behaviour will be good or bad). According to Fazio's (1990, as cited in Haddock & Maio, 1993, pp.132-133) 'Motivation and Opportunity as DEterminant (MODE) Theory', motivation and opportunity act as determinants of behaviour. If individuals have both sufficient motivation and opportunity, they may base their behaviour on a deliberative consideration of the available information. However, when either the motivation or the opportunity to make a reasoned decision is low, only attitudes that are highly accessible (attitudes that come to mind quickly and effortlessly, ie, they are automatic and mostly based on memory, experience, learning etc.) will predict spontaneous behaviour. Eagly and Chaiken's (1993, 1998, as cited in Haddock & Maio, 1993, p.133) 'Composite Theory' suggests a link between attitudes, intentions and behaviour. According to this theory, behaviour is affected by several factors: habits (i.e., relevant past behaviour); attitudes towards targets (i.e., the target of the behaviour); utilitarian outcomes (i.e., rewards and punishments associated with performing the behaviour); normative outcomes (i.e., approval and disapproval from others that might occur from performing the behaviour); and, self-identity outcomes (i.e., how performing the behaviour might influence the self-concept). Thus, attitude is an important deciding factor in one's behaviour and hence the researchers decided to measure the stakeholders' attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning, as well as to find out the causes of their attitude. In the case of a positive attitude, then the identified causes can be used as guidelines for the successful implementation of service-learning. However, in the case of a negative attitude, the identified causes can be taken up as lessons that need to be addressed by institutions.

Fishbein and Azjen (1975, as cited in Haddock & Maio, 1993, pp.131-132) asserted that behaviour was also controlled by individuals' perceptions about whether they possess the resources and opportunities required to perform the behaviour (i.e., a 'theory of planned behaviour'). Behaviour is also affected by perceived opportunities which facilitate the institutionalisation of service-learning as well as perceived threats that might hamper institutionalisation. Identifying

such opportunities and threats will help institutions assess their own operations and find their areas of strength. This will support strategies that address threats so that the institution can plan for the successful implementation of service-learning.

In the light of the above, the researchers decided to undertake the present study with the following objectives:

1. To explore the stakeholders' (i.e., administrators, teachers, and students) attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning in Assam Don Bosco University, Christ University, Lady Doak College and St Ann's College of Education.

2. To identify perceived threats to the institutionalisation of service-learning

3. To identify perceived opportunities for the institutionalisation of service-learning

4. To provide recommendations for promoting effective institutionalisation of service-learning based on stakeholders' perspectives.

Theoretical Framework of Service-learning

Service-learning as a concept in the present paper is informed by experiential learning theories that emphasize active engagement, reflection, and social interaction in education. Dewey advocated for knowledge construction through community involvement, fostering critical thinking. Kolb's model highlights a four-stage learning cycle, that implicates reflection, and this is common practice in service-learning (Rajashri, 2020a, p. 6). Thorndike's trial-and-error theory suggests learning through repeated attempts, reinforcing problem-solving skills (Nirmala, 2020a, p. 18). Constructivist theories by Piaget and Vygotsky emphasize knowledge building through experience, interaction, and cultural context (Nirmala, 2020b, p. 18). Freire's liberation theory views education as a means for social transformation, encouraging critical reflection on power structures (Rajashri, 2020b, p. 8). Together, these theories underscore the importance of experiential, reflective, and socially embedded learning.

Given the above-mentioned theories, the present study adopted an eclectic theoretical framework to assist analysis of the attitude of stakeholders towards the institutionalisation of service-learning along with their perceived threats and opportunities. In the present context, stakeholders have been working on various service-learning projects that align well to the needs of the community. However, prior to implementation and action they must identify community needs, reflect on various hypotheses, plan and conceptualize the strategies to be undertaken, and experiment the laid-out strategies leading to further deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge. All activities involve students, teachers, community members, and community experts. Thus, learning for all stakeholders is collaborative and is shaped through cultural and social interactions. Learning experiences are contextualized within real-life issues- educational, social, economic, political, etc. Such exposure allows for recognition of systemic injustice among learners thereby making them aware of the roles they can play to curb such issues. The service-learning experiences empower stakeholders by fostering and developing their knowledge, skills, and confidence, transforming them into agents of change themselves. Service-learning is viewed as an experiential process where every engagement is educative (Jacoby, 2020, para. 44). The engagement is supposed to be transformative in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of their behaviour.

Methodology

a. Method and design: Keeping in view the nature and objectives of the research, a descriptive survey was used to find out the prevailing attitudes of the stakeholder groups. A cross-sectional research design was adopted as the data was collected at one single point in time from the sample institutions.

Survey data were collected from students, teachers and administrators Data were collected from St. Anns College of Education in Mangalore on 26th April 2024. On 29th April 2024 data were collected from Christ University, Bangalore. Data were collected from the administrator and teachers of Lady Doak College, Mandurai on 2nd and 3rd May 2024 and lastly, from 6th to 16th May 2024 data was collected from the administrators, teachers, and students at Assam Don Bosco University, Tapesia Campus.

b. Participants: The participants of the study were purposively selected from catholic higher education institutions who practiced service-learning in India. The list of participating institutions is as follows:

Table 1. *List of participants*

Sl. No.	Institutions	Administrators	Teachers	Students
1	Assam Don Bosco University, Guwahati	12	35	541
2	Christ University Bangalore	68	5	178
3	St. Ann's College of Education, Mangalore	1	4	45
5	Lady Doak College, Madurai	3	11	-

As shown in Table 1, data was not collected from students of Lady Doak College because permission was not granted by the administrator of the college.

c. Tools Used in the Study:

The following tools were used for the study:

1. Service-learning attitude Scale for students- Kr. Soching and Dr. Bonnie Amonge Crerar, 2023 (Unpublished Dissertation): This scale consisted of 35 items out of which 23 items were related to positive or favourable attitude towards institutionalizing service-learning and 12 items were related to negative or unfavourable attitude. Each item had five options for respondents to choose: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. A reverse scoring technique was adopted as follows:

Table 2. *Scoring key for the responses*

Nature of the items	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Undecided (UN)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Favourable	5	4	3	2	1
Unfavourable	1	2	3	4	5

Reliability: The reliability of the scale was computed by split half method, using Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. The reliability for the half test was calculated to be 0.93, and the full test was calculated to be 0.96. As per statistics perfect corelationship is indicated by 1.00 and since the calculated reliability of the half test was 0.93 and the full test was 0.96, the scale was considered to be reliable (Sidhu, 2006, p.123) Validity: The items of the scale were critically examined by two experts i.e., Prof. Khem Chand Kapoor and Prof. Riju Sharma in the field to ensure the content validity of the scale. The coverage of subject content was found to be satisfactory.

2. Self-constructed Service-learning attitude scale for administrators: A draft attitude scale for administrators was constructed by thoroughly reading the available literature, namely, i. Furco's (1998) *Self-assessment Rubric for the Institutionalisation of Service-learning in Higher Education Institutions*; ii. Furco and Holland's (2009, 2023) *Securing Administrator Support for Service-learning Institutionalisation*; iii. Cicero-John's (2016) *Higher education administrators' perspective on service-learning*; iv. Selvam's (2023) *The role of the university president in the institutionalisation of service-learning in higher education*; v. Billig's (2006) *Lessons from Research on Teaching and Learning: Service-Learning as Effective Instruction*, and vi. Bringle and Hatcher's (1996) *Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education*. From the review, the researchers adopted the following dimensions:

i. Community engagement and partnership,

ii. Curriculum integration and learning outcomes,

iii. Institutional support and resources,

iv. Students, and

i. Teachers.

A total of 38 statements were formulated out of which 21 were favourable statements and 17 were unfavourable statements.

Each statement had five options: Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Here too the reverse scoring technique as given in Table 2 was followed. The researchers administered the draft attitude scale to nine administrators of Assam Don Bosco University, Azara Campus. Item analysis was done to select those items that could differentiate between high scorers and low scorers wherein the 't' value for each statement was calculated. Only items with 't' value 1.75 and above were retained to form the final attitude scale (Edwards, 1957, p.153). As a result, out of 38 statements only 20 statements were selected for the final attitude scale.

Reliability: Following the split-half method, the reliability of the half-scale was calculated to be 0.6 by applying Product moment correlation formula, while the reliability of the full-scale was 0.75, by applying Spearman Brown Prophecy formula. Further, the reliability score is considered acceptable for the present scale (Garret, 2022, p. 35a). Thus, the internal consistency of the scale was established.

Validity: The content validity of the items was established by consulting with subject experts from our University, i.e., Prof. K. C. Kapoor and Prof. Riju Sharma. The coverage of subject content was found to be satisfactory.

3. Self-constructed service-learning attitude scale for teachers: A draft attitude scale for teachers was constructed. For the construction of statements, the first step was to review the available literature given as follows: i. Furco (1998): *Self-assessment Rubric for the Institutionalisation of Service-learning in Higher Education Institutions*, ii. Billig (2006): *Lessons from Research on Teaching and Learning: Service-Learning as Effective Instruction*, iii. Bringle and Hatcher (1996): *Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education*, iv. Cooper (2013): *Ten Years in the Trenches: Faculty Perspectives on Sustaining Service-Learning*, v. Casey, Kirk, and McLendon (2023): *Understanding preservice teachers' perceptions of service-learning when teaching educational technology to students with exceptionalities*, vi. Flecky (2011): *Foundations of Service-Learning*, and vii. Hiller (2019): *A Phenomenological Study of Faculty Experience with Service-learning*. The following dimensions for the attitude scale for teachers were adopted from the literature:

ii. Pedagogical impact,

iii. Institutional support,

iv. Student engagement and learning outcomes, and

v. Workload and time management.

A total of 25 statements were formulated out of which 18 were favourable and 7 were unfavourable statements. Each statement had five options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The researchers administered the draft attitude scale to 25 teachers of Assam Don Bosco University, Azara Campus. Scoring was done by reverse technique (see Table 2). Item analysis was done to select those items that can differentiate between high scorers and low scorers. The 't' value for each statement was calculated. Only items with 't' value of 1.75 and above were retained to form the final attitude scale. Out of 25 statements, only 17 were selected for the final attitude scale

Reliability: Following the split- half method, the reliability of the half-scale was calculated to be 0.79, and the reliability of the full-scale was 0.88 which was deemed satisfactory (Garrett, 2022, p. 351b) . The internal consistency of the scale was established.

Validity: The content validity of the items was established by consulting with subject experts from our university, i.e., Prof. K. C.

Kapoor and Prof. Riju Sharma. The coverage of subject content was found to be satisfactory.

4. Self-constructed checklist to identify threats and opportunities: To identify threats 11 statements representing situations that act as threats to the institutionalisation of service-learning had been formulated. Similarly, to identify opportunities the researchers constructed 19 statements representing opportunities such as research, funding, paper writing and publication, presenting papers in an international platform, etc., as a result of the institutionalisation of service-learning. These statements were prepared after in-depth discussion between the researchers themselves who have been actively involved in the institutionalisation of service-learning, also, the aforementioned reviews done for preparing the statements for the attitude scales enlightened the researchers with several situations, and informal discussions with students and teachers of ADBU helped in formulating statements for the checklist.

5. One open-ended question regarding ways to improve institutionalisation of service-learning.

d. Procedure for data collection: The research team collected data by sending emails to target institutions, outlining the study and its purpose. Institutions which responded positively and gave permission for the research were approached and data was collected during the months of April and May 2024.

e. Data analysis: The collected data was tabulated, analysed and interpreted using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are presented below:

Objective 1: Stakeholders' attitude towards institutionalisation of service-learning

To be able to achieve the formulated Objective 1, the Mean, Standard Deviation, P33 and P66 (that represent the 33rd percentile and 66th percentile respectively) were calculated for administrators, teachers and students. See Table 3 for the summary.

Table 3. *Summary of Mean, Standard Deviation, P33 and P66 of the Stakeholders' Attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service learning*

Stakeholders (N =903)	Mean	SD	P_{33}	P_{66}
Administrators (N = 84)	57.3	6.16	56	60
Teachers (N = 55)	63.96	8.71	62	68.64
Students (N = 764)	125.73	14.4	120	131

Interpretation

Administrators

The investigators used the attitude scale they developed to measure the attitude of administrators towards the institutionalisation of service-learning. Table 3 reveals the computed attitude mean score of 83 selected sample of administrators and it came out to be 57.3 and the SD was 6.16. As the minimum and maximum score of the attitude scale are 20 and 100 respectively, the middle score of the attitude scale is 60.0. The mean score for administrators is (57.3). This shows that the administrators only reported a moderate level of positivity towards the institutionalisation of service-learning.

From the information collected through the checklist, negative attitudes of administrators can be attributed to challenges such as time constraints, mismatched placements, inadequately planned activities, concerns over academic performance, logistical issues, students' fear of working among unknown communities, and teachers' fear of losing control over their students. In contrast, some administrators were supportive of service-learning because it promotes mutual understanding among stakeholders, emotional maturity, all-round student development, research opportunities, improved classroom discussions, and teacher skill enhancement.

Teachers

To find out the attitude of teachers towards the institutionalisation of service-learning the researchers used the self-prepared attitude scale to collect data. The Mean, SD, P33 and P66 were calculated for 55 sampled teachers (refer to Table 3). The Mean and SD were calculated to be 53.96 and 8.71 respectively. The minimum and maximum scores of the attitude scale were 17 and 85, respectively. As such the middle score of the attitude scale was 51, and the obtained mean score of the teachers was calculated as 63.96. This shows that the teachers generally had favourable attitudes towards the institutionalisation of service-learning.

From the data collected through the checklist the teachers' positive attitudes towards service-learning can be attributed to its contribution to teachers own effectiveness and competency; enhancing emotional maturity of students; providing students with a deeper understanding of course content, and offering teachers opportunities for innovative teaching methods. Some teachers received incentives on completion of activities and believed it led to a student-centric education system while instilling dignity for labour among the students.

Students

From the students, data was collected using the attitude scale prepared by Mr Soching and Dr Bonnie Amonge Crerar as a part of MA dissertation which is an unpublished work. The Mean was calculated to be 125.73 and SD was calculated to be 14.4. The minimum score on the scale was 35 and the maximum score was 175, thereby the middle score of the scale was 105. In comparison to the middle score of the attitude scale, the mean score of the students was found to be 125.73 and hence much higher indicating that the students have a substantially favourable attitude towards the institutionalisation of service-learning as a pedagogy.

From the data collected through the checklist, the favourable attitudes to SL can be attributed to students perceiving SL as a valuable opportunity for hands-on learning, citizenship training, skill development, self-paced learning, and advocacy support.

Objective 2: Perceived threats related to the institutionalisation of service-learning

Based on the prevalence of responses received from the administrators and teachers, the researchers categorised the threatening situations that can hamper the institutionalisation of service-learning into three categories: least threatening, moderately threatening, and highly threatening, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Threats associated with the institutionalisation of service-learning*

Least Threatening	Moderately Threatening	Highly Threatening
Students are confused about their prescribed syllabus and service learning. Too many students in the institution makes it difficult for placement in the community	To get cooperation from all the faculty and students is challenging Negative attitude of students towards service learning	Lack of funds and resources creates an obstacle in the implementation of innovative ideas Unavailability of space, time and accessibility to implement service-learning activities
Shortage of leave makes it difficult for teachers to carry out service-learning activities	Clash of service-learning activities with exam time and stringency within the timetable makes it difficult to conduct service learning on a regular basis	
Negative attitude of community members towards service learning Difficulty in linking the community needs with the respective discipline An extensive curriculum is a hurdle to implementing service learning	Inadequate training for service learning at a mass level	

Interpretation

The biggest threat to institutionalising service-learning is insufficient funds and resources (83.67%), followed by space, time, and accessibility constraints (65.30%). Moderate challenges included student reluctance (57.14%), faculty cooperation issues (51.02%), inadequate training (57.14%), and scheduling conflicts (57.14%). Lesser barriers involved syllabus integration (38.77%), student placements (40.81%), teacher leave shortages (42.85%), community resistance (44.89%), and curriculum constraints (44.89%). Additional concerns included poor monitoring, lack of stakeholder understanding, teacher inefficiency, limited institutional support for NGO collaborations, and untrained community partners.

Objective 3: Perceived opportunities associated with the institutionalisation of service-learning

To identify perceived opportunities associated with the institutionalisation of service-learning the researchers divided the opportunities into three categories based on the percentage of responses against each opportunity.

Table 5. *Opportunities associated with the institutionalisation of service-learning*

Limited opportunity	Moderate opportunity	Substantial opportunity
Students are industry-ready for placements	To get cooperation from all the faculty and students is challenging Relevant placement helps students experience the demands of their respective professions	Students and faculty members understand the true essence of community engagement which is helping to bring about change and transformation in the community
The institution gets funding in lieu of the service learning initiatives	Working with relevant community partners keep faculties updated about the latest innovations in their respective field	Students learn the art to plan and put it into action
Service learning helps teachers to experiment with innovative teaching methods	The head, heart and hand of both students and teachers are addressed through service learning	Teacher can provide students with the opportunity to apply theoretical course contents in real world
	Service learning provides scope for collaborative research across departments	Teachers get the opportunity to collaborate with community partners to help students get the field experts perspective of their course content
	Students develop the art of documenting every action taken by them	Students get the opportunity to identify their capabilities and uniqueness
	Teachers get the opportunity for professional growth and development	

Interpretation

Service-learning helped students and teachers realise their role in transforming community (71.42%), real-world application of classroom knowledge (73.46%, 75.59%), expert insights regarding their specific courses (81.63%), self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses (83.67%), and skill development (83.67%). Moderate gains included job specific placement helped understand the demands of the job (53.06%), faculty being updated about the new trend and innovations in their subject of interest (53.06%), holistic learning since it addressed the head, hand and heart (57.14%), interdisciplinary research was encouraged (59.1%), documentation skills were enhanced since everything had to be documented (59.18%), and faculty development was ensured (61.22%). Lesser opportunities include industry readiness (30.61%), funding (36.73%), and innovative teaching methods (42.85%).

Objective 4: Recommendations for promoting effective institutionalisation of service-learning based on perspectives collected from the stakeholders

After analysing the collected information from the stakeholders on the open-ended questionnaire, the following recommendations were put forward thematically:

A. Orientation: Provision for ongoing orientation for all concerned should be arranged with respect to service-learning concept, objectives, nature, scope, service-learning as a philosophy and as a pedagogy, ensuring quality through service-learning.

B. Inclusion of service-learning in the curriculum: There should be clarity about the content of service-learning, clarity about the process of service-learning like programmes, seminars, workshops, and other social assignments, and evaluation of service-learning experiences in terms of its effect on students and community members.

C. Participation of stakeholders: Active participation of faculty, students and community members should be ensured along with the provision of incentives.

D. Funding and logistics support: Sufficient funding and logistic support needs to be provided to carry out the service-learning activities successfully.

Limitations and prospects of the study

The study reported stakeholders' attitudes toward the institutionalisation of service-learning but did not include community partners. Future research could incorporate the community perspective for a more comprehensive understanding. The study was also limited in its geographical coverage that included one institution from Northeast India, and three from South India. Future research should expand its scope by incorporating diverse geographic regions enabling cross-cultural comparison, including community perspectives, and adopting longitudinal methodologies to assess the sustained impact of service-learning over time and the institutional initiatives and conditions that support this. One of the major limitations lies with the instruments which have some reliability and content validity, but their overall validity is limited due to the lack of rigorous testing through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Though the tools have been useful in this study to understand Indian higher education institutions and SL, their applicability beyond this setting is not yet determined. Future research should focus on further psychometric validation to enhance their broader utility. However, at this early stage, they have shown promise in contributing valuable insights. The second major limitation of the present study was that it did not address the different experiences of administrators and teachers with respect to the challenges and opportunities of the institutionalisation of SL. As such future analysis should be considered for greater comparison of the teachers and administrators as they are likely to experience the challenges and opportunities of institutionalising SL differently.

Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

Each of the institutions visited adopted service-learning as a part of their curriculum to provide a platform for experiential learning. The uniqueness of the program is that it is a collaborative affair between the community members, teachers, students, and administrators. Further, there are no ready-made answers to the problems addressed and students must gain insight into applying their classroom learning to help communities evolve and develop. Since quite some time had passed since the institutionalisation of service-learning, it was decided to examine stakeholders' attitudes toward the institutionalisation of service-learning in four Indian higher education institutions, revealing diverse perspectives. While students and teachers demonstrated both supportive and hesitant attitudes, administrators showed relatively lower enthusiasm owing to time constraints, mismatched placements, inadequately planned activities, teachers losing control over students, etc. Key barriers to institutionalisation included inadequate funding, resource limitations, and logistical constraints. Dustker et al. (2021) mentioned a lack of expertise among teachers in designing and implementing service-learning courses. Significant opportunities that were identified were community transformation, real-world application of knowledge, skill development, and professional growth.

The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on service-learning. Theoretically, it expands existing knowledge by analysing stakeholder attitudes and through this has reinforced the relevance of experiential learning and institutionalisation models as described above, and in particular, the relevance of these models in faith-based Indian higher education settings. It underscores the necessity of policy-driven institutional commitment, faculty engagement, and structured implementation in sustaining service-learning initiatives. Practically, the study provides actionable recommendations for higher education institutions, including embedding service-learning into curricula through structured coursework, assessment frameworks, and faculty training programs. It emphasises the need for dedicated funding, logistical support, and incentives to enhance stakeholder participation. Additionally, it advocates for stronger university-community partnerships, enabling collaborative service-learning experiences that address real societal challenges while enriching academic learning.

To drive the institutionalisation of service-learning forward, universities must take decisive action by integrating service-learning into institutional policies, allocating sufficient financial and human resources, and fostering a culture of collaboration among administrators, faculty, students, and community partners. Here, it needs to be mentioned that according to Furco (2021) each faith-based institution will have its elements of institutionalisation that needs to be recognized and modified so that these elements reflect in greater detail the central tenets of the institution thereby strengthening the institutionalisation of service-learning. Furco also mentioned that in framing the service- learning activities,

more importance should be given to community voice and reciprocity, issues of equity and inclusion, acknowledging and honouring the indigenous history of the community, together with more opportunity for community engagement and responsibility. Such service-learning frameworks will not only enhance student learning outcomes but also create a more socially responsible and engaged higher education system, ensuring long-term benefits for academia and society alike.

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