

A Case of Efforts for Inclusive Growth through Student and Community Engagement



ISBN: 978-1-943295-02-9

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This is a primary research paper on initiatives taken up by Enactus at Jain University, for engaging student community in village development projects. Based on the primary sources we also uncover various dynamics, challenges associated with community projects. It is an attempt to showcase the challenges faced by various stakeholders when community engagement projects were taken up by students in villages. This paper also makes an attempt to give few suggestions based on the insights gotten through experiences and conversations with various stakeholders at during these efforts for inclusive growth at various villages. Case Study Methodology is used.

Keywords: Community engagement, Student Engagement, Inclusive Growth, Experiential Learning

1. Introduction

Higher Educational Institutions can no longer operate in isolation. They have to be more socially relevant in both their primary functions of teaching and research. Teaching fraternity, student community and potential of HEIs is under tapped given what they are capable of. HEIs and Universities today are being challenged all over the world for them not being socially relevant. It is said they have to start undertaking more regionally based research in Universities and HEIs will become socially more relevant. Economic value is always highlighted in teaching and learning in educational institutions. Such kind of regionally based research and community engagement approach will add the most important but often neglected 'social value' to the student community. Student community and its dynamism and extreme energy could be tapped and channelized in a rightful way which will imbibe social value and make students more socially responsible which is the need of the hour.

Core Life skills as suggested by UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO to be integral part of primary and secondary education could also powerfully be integrated with community based research and engagement in Higher Education so that learning outcomes through these engagement programs could be positively achieved for student community as well. There are ten core life skills which are divided into three main categories - Thinking Skills, Social Skills and Emotional Skills. This will act as tool for behavioural change and behavioural development and addresses the balance in three most important areas – knowledge, attitude and skills.

Challenges

HEIs should start accepting this challenge posed by the world today to be more relevant and start being an interface for community engagement and inclusive growth. However the following pointers have to be addressed to set up a framework at a broader level:

- Community Engagement
- Faculty Engagement
- Student engagement
- Research based
- Learning outcomes for the students
- Economic, social and environmental value addition for communities
- Ongoing and sustainable models
- Accountability
- Relevance of curriculum
- Inclusion of indigenous knowledge

Above challenges will have to be sorted out and smooth functioning interface has to be created. Unless different related issues are streamlined, it may result in chaos for the educational institutions. Universities can be transformational when systems and process are in place wrt the above. These efforts will foster inclusive growth and also social responsibility among students.

Enactus, a student organization, since its inception in our campus has been working on various social projects. 'Ignite' is brainchild of Enactus Forum in our campus where ideas come together. It more like a mass movement. Enactus has been a platform to apply the experiential pedagogy and also work with communities for inclusive growth.

2. Review of Literature

Report of the Subcommittee, Planning Commission (2011) documents about various forms of community engagement and recommends that a strong interface be set up. **Community Engagement with Higher Educational Institutions and Social**

Responsibility in Higher Education in Karnataka, Draft Report (2015) has documented the data collected from various Universities and colleges across Karnataka shows that community engagement activities are of various types. It also states that 'the learning, exposure and insights that experience of community engagement provides is of special significance as it develops a learners' 'world view', social sensitivity abiding commitment to social engagement'. It also documents that the young minds get grounded in the socio-economic realities of life through this long lasting experiential learning and how it influences in multiple ways to contribute back to the communities/societies once they entire their professional world.

Karnataka Youth Policy (2012) states that, 'multiple capacities of youth often do not find an avenue for expression. Most young people in the state often say that they would like to be involved in serving the community but have very limited opportunities for the same have strongly endorsed on 'volunteerism'. Karnataka knowledge commission sponsored **Study on the perceptions, Aspirations, expectations and Attitudes of youth in Karnataka Report (2011)** indicates that 'being socially responsible was an aspiration of majority of the youth. They also feel that society must give the younger generation more responsibility'.

Life Skills Based Education, CBSE, documents the importance of life skills in primary and secondary education to avoid adolescents getting into anti-social behaviors and to channel them in the right direction for their character building.

Richard Layard (2007) observes that a major purpose of schools must be to help develop good and happy people – especially at a time when growing numbers of children are suffering from emotional disturbance. New cadre of teachers are to trained and developed to teach values and ways to happiness. **James and Gentry (1990)** identified that the instructor is responsible for providing the experiential stimulus, and the quality of that stimulus will vary greatly depending upon the pedagogical approach used. **ELC (2011)** found that experiential learning helps to complete students' preparation for their chosen careers which reinforce course content and theory. Students learn through student- rather than instructor-centered experiences by doing, discovering, reflecting and applying. It builds those experiences for students that develop life skills for them.

Dahan and Senol (2012) observed that CSR activities through the universities like taking up social responsibility project and other social causes will not only help communities but also helps in building corporate image of the universities. **Chopra and Marriya(2013)** documented that Educational outreach efforts have the capability to make a real and lasting difference for all players involved.

Kickul, Selvadurai and Griffiths (2012) observed that situated learning is a transaction between the person and the social environment. It occurs through the person's experience in the social environment or "communities of practice". Preparation exercise and field experience will create social entrepreneurship. Social innovation and change into the communities is possible by multidisciplinary approach in Universities. **Brown (2000)** documented that the goals of the curriculum are to teach students the skills to build a business, and in a larger sense, to take responsibility and initiative in their lives. Texts are aimed at giving only the necessary information, and worksheets are used to help students focus on how they will develop their own businesses. Students gain hands-on experience in creating a business, sometimes in a simulated environment and sometimes in the real marketplace.

The earlier studies have addressed the issues of experiential learning, outreach social projects, expectations of the youth for holistic development of students. However, the studies have not brought the importance of experiential learning and outreach projects for inclusive growth, which is very essential in preparing students for the future world. Also community based research and engagement and expectations of today's youth is not matched for positive way forward for HEIs.

Need for the Study: The review of literature suggests how experiential learning and life skills are important for student community for their future, how it helps in the holistic development of students. The studies also indicate how Universities can start being proactive in creating social relevance for themselves and for society at large. On the one hand there are expectations of students to contribute towards communities and on the other how Universities are falling short in creating a powerful interface for community based research and engagement. There is an effort in this direction in the entire world. Most of the studies empirically documented the importance of experiential learning, social responsibility in Higher Education and community based research and engagement in developed countries. Not many studies were pursued in developing countries, particularly in an Indian context. So present study is an attempt to know how experiential learning, community based research and engagement and social responsibility can be integrated in HEIs for overall development of students, to recreate social relevance and for inclusive growth.

3. Research Design

1. Objectives of the Study

- To study the student initiatives in outreach projects.
- To study how such student-community engagement programs can lead to empowerment of students and communities.
- To study how these efforts can lead to inclusive growth.

2. Methodology: Case study methodology is used.

- **Type of Research:** Both, field research and library research were undertaken. The objectives were first analyzed through field research and then elaborated through library research. The content of the paper is primarily focused on empirical data.

3. **Scope of the Study:** The scope of the study is limited to the objectives mentioned above. The study can be further extended, understood and analyzed by measuring the impact of the initiatives of the students. The study will be more meaningful when a deeper study is conducted to understand awareness and interest levels of students and faculty in taking up such initiatives.
4. **Limitations of the Study:** The findings and suggestions are limited by the opinions and experiences of the students, faculty and parents during the projects. Also only some students, concerned faculty have been spoken to understand the initiative. Also few parents' opinion only has been included.

IGNITE – 2015: An Attempt for Efforts towards Inclusive Growth

Ignite is an annual event conducted by Enactus student organization in our campus. Ignite-2015 is third in a row. Ignite is an effort to build social responsibility and entrepreneurial skills among students, hence it is conducted as an inter-class event where all sections of first semester UG Commerce students are spoken to and are asked to participate. The event culminates in the form of competition which is basically a motivating factor for students to participate. This time Ignite had a completely different theme which was exciting and challenging at the same time. Students were asked to take up any village nearby Bangalore, identify one problem in the village and work on the same and produce some measurable results. They were given three weeks time to work on the same. Weekly reviews were conducted to see if students have identified the village, identified a problem there, if they started working on solving the problem. They had to make difference to the villages.

Following learning outcomes were expected to be achieved through event Ignite:

- Getting acquainted with villages and villagers' life around Bangalore.
- Idea generation
- Conducting surveys in villages
- Identifying problems in the villages
- Team building as it was an interclass event
- Leadership
- Meeting the deadlines
- Meeting different stake holders for village development projects
- Hands on experience of the subjects and concepts they learn in classrooms

Organizing team had divided 11 sections having 50 students each on an average among themselves to mentor the classes. For these mentors and sections Faculty mentors were also assigned. This was all to make sure that students can sail through the challenges easily.

Some of the noteworthy projects that emerged out of Ignite - 2015 are as below

Project Name	Village	Project description/Objectives	Impact	Project potential for scalability	Project potential for sustainability
Best out of waste (Quilling, Pillow covers, Eco friendly dustbins)	Netanahalli, Magadi Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve employment opportunities • to teach skill like quilling 	Initiated with quillings with community and are with talks with Belaku , NGO and Mahila Sanghas	High	High
Impact 2015 (Pottery)	Siddapura, Harohalli Hobli, Kanakapura Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to impart skills of pottery making to have social, economic and environmental impact 	They identified the soil quality is highly suitable for making pots and imparted pottery making skills through a professional trainer to the interested villagers	High	High
Each one Teach One	Kamalapur, Vijayapura Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to give books, bags and stationery • to encourage sports, provided balls 	They plan to teach them basic English	Average	Average
Project Ignition	Nittur, Kempanahalli, Kunigal Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to generate electricity with the help of a dynamo • to teach them traditional method of purifying water 	They created working models for both but yet to implement	High	High
Belaku	Achalu, Ramnagara Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to introduce villagers to better markets to market their products 	Educated villagers in soil conservation, better Raw materials availability and pollution control	Average	Average
A step ahead	Pandithanahalli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy development • setting up a library 	They have obtained permission from the Block Education Officer, Tumkur to open a library in the school, started collection of books	High	High
Sampark	Kanvemahadevapura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to construct public toilets • to provide water filters for pure and safe drinking water 	They have initiated legal procedures for constructing public toilets	High	High
Urban Dreams	Maaligenahalli and Neeleri, Devanahalli Taluk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to create employment opportunities • to create a developed village 	They set up two ration shops and also distribution of old clothes, food, snacks, providing dustbins, talks on environmental protection and health and sanitation were given	High	Average

Challenges

Given that this is something new we were all venturing into for the first time, faculty coordinators, students and management faced challenges from time to time. Various challenges were experienced by different stakeholders at different points in time during the course of the Project.

For Students

- Identifying the village nearby was a challenge. Students had to screen different villages and zero in on a village which fitted into the objective they wanted to achieve.
- In some cases villages seemed to be self-sufficient and also sometimes not open to be made difference to. In such cases they had to look for other villages.
- Motivating their classmates to participate in idea generation or for pooling money etc wasn't easy for them. Sometimes leadership was not acceptable to the class. Leadership changed sometimes motivating and some other times demotivating or demoralizing the students.
- Tests, Internal assessment activities, Preparatory exams etc posed a lot challenges for students' full-fledged participation in the execution of the project.
- Students missing classes on few occasions for the Project created difficulty for students at their home front. Their integrity was questioned from time to time.
- Most of the times students struggled with the idea of bringing in sustainability and scalability to the project.
- Though students were permitted create fund-raising events in the campus to fund their own activities may be it seemed too much for them. They found pitching in their own money for the project more convenient. However they were told that this was a feasible on a continuous basis.
- Creating and executing their own project and funding it and leading to create measurable results with other pressing commitments at college and home front made it extremely challenging for them.
- Documentation and sometimes multiple reporting were other aspects which we wanted students to learn which they found it difficult to always maintain and update.
- Even those senior students who were mentoring the juniors found it draining experience sometimes as they had not just to act as organizers but also as mentors and constantly follow up and motivate the juniors.
- Mentors had problems reporting to few faculty advisors and thereby some confusion was created in the team which had to be resolved in the first place.
- Both juniors and seniors had resistance towards the whole idea of village projects in the beginning. Overcoming that resistance took some time.
- The whole project idea was not planned end-to-end as one of the parent cited. Since students had travel 30-50 kms one way for village visits, there was high risk involved in terms of their means of transportation and safety. This raised a lot of concerns once village visits started happening as once a vehicle hired and driven by students was stranded in a remote area on their way back home. Hence we started the process of asking students to get letters of undertaking signed by their parents and also called up parents in case of doubt. This made the entire process even more tedious.
- Some teams also had problems gaining the confidence of the communities.

For Faculty

- Faculty were also asked to mentor classes and projects. They were made directly responsible to deliver on the projects, though no in front of the students. They were asked to be accessible to the students for clarifying their doubts and to constantly motivate the students.
- Faculty advisors had to constantly coordinate among themselves and also between students and management. This was amidst their regular workload of teaching and other related aspects.
- They were also asked to keep monitoring and checking the integrity of the students. to always validate the information being provided by the students.
- Motivating students to motivate communities from time to time was a draining experience sometimes.
- Following up with travel to villages departure and arrival time, how many students are going, what is the mode of commutation, verifying the letters of undertaking and calling up the parents etc in all was a difficult task.
- Faculty faced challenge of time management – balancing their time between the time outreach projects were demanding and the time they need to spend on preparation for their classes.
- Scheduling of the event, certificate designing and printing and a lot many more things that need to be done for event were also challenging for some faculty advisors as they were getting trained for future succession.

For Parents

- Some parents criticized saying such a risk project should not be given to the students when logistics part is taken care by the management end-to-end. Such lapse on the part of the college could pose a serious threat to the safety of the students, it could even pose threat to their lives.

- Some parents expressed their concerns why something so big needs to be done when every subject teacher is giving assignments and deadlines to submit them for internal assessment.
- Some parents asked if their work in village is considered for assessment or is it part of any subject assignment. It was difficult to answer all their questions.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

- HEIs and Universities should start supporting such initiatives in a full-fledged way as there is an immense learning in this at experiential level and also promotes inclusive growth.
- This community based research and engagement also imparts important core life skills among students for their holistic growth.
- HEIs and Universities can start routing such initiatives through forums like Enactus, NCC, NSS etc. For it to be valued more deeply all these activities could be structured in such a way that it becomes a credit course or an integral part of their curriculum which can neither be questioned nor be neglected.
- Universities should take up Inclusive Growth as one of their main objectives.
- Research in the HEIs should be necessarily based directed towards inclusive growth and regional development.
- Experiential learning will create our future generation to be ready to take on the professional world and also contribute their maximum towards societal growth in multiple ways.
- Powerful interface has to be set up which is more structured and feasible for all stakeholders.

Task Force, The Planning Commission, Government of India, made the following recommendations to 'Strengthen Community Engagement of Higher Education Institutions' for the 12th Five Year Plan:

- Community engagement should not be seen as an 'addition' to learning and teaching, but intrinsic to it.
- Facilitate the creation of an Alliance for Community Engagement, which will be a membership-based network primarily engaged in promoting ideas and practices of community engagement throughout the country.
- Create an Autonomous Empowered Committee on Community Engagement as a funding and policy mechanism
- Enable Flexibility in Curricula to enable more meaningful Community Engagement in Higher Education institutions.
- Credit Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in conducting evaluations.
- Create new Community Institutions primarily engaged in community based knowledge.

HEIs can engage in any form of engagement like Linking learning with community service, Linking research with community knowledge, Knowledge Sharing & Knowledge Mobilization, Devising New Curriculum and Courses, Including practitioners as teacher.

5. Conclusion

- Though this was very challenging and difficult to implement in reality the idea of village projects, but the whole event was a learning process. If we have to take on something big like this then it should be more methodical. It is only when we create a flawless structure, we can make community based research and engagement a reality. All HEIs have to strive to achieve above recommendations by Task Force.
- Establishing powerful linkages with NGOs, Corporates and parent community and regional communities will go a long way in creating inclusive growth.
- Scope for Future Research:
- Though this can be sighted as a case study, there is an immense scope for further research to understand the interest and awareness levels of all stakeholders for a meaningful community based research and engagement for HEIs and for empowering student community with social responsibility perspective.

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