



Assessment of Community Service Practices in Ethiopia Universities: a case Study in Some selected Government Universities

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Abstract

The current study aimed to assess the status of community service practices and the possible barriers to instructors' involvement in community service activities at four selected government universities in Ethiopia. A quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, involving 322 instructors selected from the four universities using a stratified random sampling technique. A questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect data from the participants. Validity and reliability tests were conducted during the pilot study to ensure the questionnaire's suitability before it was used for the actual sample. Descriptive statistics such as the mean, standard deviation, and percentage, along with inferential statistics, including a one-sample t-test, were utilized in the data analysis using SPSS version 24. The results indicated that instructors' participation in community service activities is remarkably low. Several factors were identified that challenge instructors' participation in community service activities, including a lack of self-interest, lack of incentives, poor community service atmosphere, excessive administrative tasks, lack of institutional support, insufficient equipment, and lack of willingness from stakeholders. The study concluded that university-community connections in the sampled public universities in Ethiopia are minimal. This is an alarming finding, urging universities to reconsider their policies and their implementation in a way that encourages instructors to engage in community service activities.

1 Introduction

Community service is the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (Driscoll, 2009). Moreover, Sandmann (2008) described community service as a process that entails the creation, integration, application, and transmission of knowledge for the benefit of external audiences and the university. Community service includes all forms of community engagement, such as engaged scholarship, service-learning, civic engagement, and voluntarism (Johnson, 2020). Due to many factors, universities are not engaging in community service activities. Kezar (2018) de-

scribed the pressures and challenges within the modern academic workplace that potentially affect community service involvement. These challenges include both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors relate to the environment and working conditions, such as workload, reward systems, policies, and opportunity structures. Intrinsic factors focus on the nature of the work, its impact on faculty members, how the work is carried out, the activities associated with the work, and the amount of feedback individuals receive about their engagement (Kezar, 2018).

Motivation is a key component for academic staff

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to engage in community service activities. Adekalu *et al.* (2017) and Colbeck and Michael (2006) acknowledged that academics need to be motivated by certain factors to be involved in community services. A poor reward system is one reason why it is difficult for most academics to engage in community service (Vogelgesang *et al.*, 2010). If community engagement is not regarded as a requirement for promotion, it becomes difficult to expect more engagement in such activities (Gorski & Mehta, 2016). On the other hand, many institutions give little attention to community engagement, resulting in reduced staff involvement (Adekalu *et al.*, 2017; Adekalu *et al.*, 2018). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) noted that in higher education institutions, community service is often viewed as an impediment to promotion because it is time-consuming and prevents those who participate from engaging in other meaningful work. According to Gappa *et al.* (2010), community service does not align with teaching and research activities in universities, which is why instructors dedicate less time to it. However, if universities have strong community service policies, instructors are more likely to be motivated to participate (Colbeck & Weaver, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Community service is one of the core functions of higher education, alongside teaching and research. It is key for academic and research staff in promoting the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural development of communities (Adekalu *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, universities' community service activities are a tool for national development through knowledge sharing and creation. In the Ethiopian context, delivering community service is a major objective of higher education institutions (HEIs), along with research and teaching-learning activities (Damons *et al.*, 2018). As noted by Nasir and Diah (2016), community service is a vital component of university-community relations that requires attention. However, several factors make community engagement a challenging task for many academic staff, such as work-related responsibilities, teaching, student supervision, advising, and other professional duties (Adekalu *et al.*, 2017; Terosky *et al.*, 2014; Ziker, 2014).

The current study investigated the challenges of community service and identified the status of instructors' engagement. This study aims to fill gaps not fully covered in previous research, such as:

- **Instructors' Motivation and Burnout:** There is limited research on the psychological aspects of instructors' engagement, including motivation, satisfaction, and burnout related to community service. Exploring these could uncover personal and institutional factors that either promote or discourage sustained involvement.
- **Comparative Analysis Across Institutions:** A gap exists in comparing the challenges and engagement levels across different types of institutions. This could reveal unique challenges and engagement patterns not addressed in current literature.
- **Longitudinal Impact:** There is limited research on the long-term impact of instructors' engagement in community service on both professional development and community benefits. Investigating this could provide insights into sustained engagement and outcomes.
- **Policy and Institutional Support:** Another gap lies in understanding the role of institutional policies and support systems in either facilitating or hindering instructors' community service engagement. This research highlights what types of support structures are most effective.

Since this study focuses on these areas, it addresses existing gaps and contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and dynamics of community service engagement among instructors. For this purpose, four universities—Dilla, Hawassa, Wachamo, and Wolayita Sodo—were selected for the study. Two universities were chosen from the first generation and two from the second generation, all located in the former southern regional state of Ethiopia.

General Objective

The general objective of the current study was to investigate the status of community service practices in some selected public universities in Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study aimed:

- to examine the status of university instructors' participation in community service activities.
- to identify barriers that hinder instructors from participating in community service activities.

Research Questions

The current study is guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent do university instructors participate in community service activities?
- What challenges (if any) do instructors face as barriers to participating in community service activities?

2 Research Method

2.1 Research Design

The study utilizes a quantitative descriptive survey research approach to achieve its objectives. One of the main topics of the questionnaire focused on the community service practices of the instructors. In addition, a survey was employed to gather data regarding how educators have addressed community issues. The questionnaire included questions related to the community service activities instructors had undertaken and any potential challenges they faced.

2.2 Sampling Technique and Sample

The primary purpose of stratified random sampling is to ensure that different subgroups (strata) within a population are adequately represented in the sample, improving the precision and accuracy of the results. By dividing the population into strata based

on specific characteristics and then randomly sampling from each stratum, researchers can obtain a sample that reflects the diversity of the entire population (Lohr, 2019). This technique is particularly useful when the population is heterogeneous. In the current study, universities were taken as strata. The study population consisted of instructors actively involved in research at four selected universities: Dilla University, Hawassa University, Wachemo University, and Wolayta Sodo University. Based on our initial investigation, there were 1,652 instructors across these four universities familiar with research and community service activities.

2.3 Sample Size Determination

A sample is a portion of a larger population, specially selected to represent the whole. A well-chosen sample is less time-consuming, less costly, less cumbersome, and more practical to administer than conducting a census of the entire target population. Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes. This formula assumes a sample size, n , for a 95% confidence level and $p = 0.5$. In the current study, with a population $N = 1,652$ and a 5% precision level, this formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size.

Yamane's formula: Sample size

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where: n = sample size; N = population size and e = level of precision or sampling error which is $\pm 5\%$ at 95% confidence level.

$$n = \frac{1652}{1 + 1652(0.05)^2}, n = \frac{1652}{1 + 1652(0.0025)}, n = \frac{1652}{1 + 4.13}$$

$$n = \frac{1652}{5.13} = 322.02$$

The sample fraction is $\frac{322}{1652} = 0.19$

Therefore, the stratified sampling technique was followed, and based on this, the sample proportion was calculated as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sample Proportion in each university

S.No.	Participant University	Instructors who are Actively Involved in Research	Sample Proportion
1	Dilla University	452	88
2	Wolaita University	320	62
3	Hawassa University	516	101
4	Wachemo University	364	71
Total		1652	322

2.4 Data Collection Instrument

The study utilized a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess instructors' community service practices and investigate the challenges encountered in these practices. The questionnaire was thematically designed: the first part explored the instructors' participation in community services, while the second part assessed possible barriers to participation in community service activities. In the section on barriers, a five-point Likert scale was used, with the following ratings: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Not Sure (NS), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA).

2.5 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The quality of the questionnaire was assured before being applied to the sample respondents. The con-

sistency and accuracy of the survey were ensured through both reliability and validity checks. Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure—essentially, its accuracy. Content validity was assessed by two experts in the field. Corrections, including the inclusion and exclusion of certain content, were made during the pilot study before the questionnaire was administered to the sample.

Similarly, the consistency of the questionnaire items was measured statistically using Cronbach's alpha. The possible barriers to conducting research consisted of 12 items, and the barriers to publication practices included 10 items—these were the two themes considered. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency (reliability) of the survey items in these two themes. The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for Thematic Questionnaires

S.No.	Themes	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Instructors' Participation in Community Service Activity	2	.714
2	Possible Barriers to Participate in Community Service	10	.800

Table 2, indicated in both themes the Cronbach's alpha greater than the threshold 0.7 which is acceptable.

2.6 Data Collection Procedure

After identifying the sample instructors, the questionnaire was distributed to collect information about their opinions regarding their participation in community service. Data collectors, mainly co-investigators, traveled to the four sample universities and, together with collaborator teams at

the universities, distributed the questionnaire. The process took two days to complete and return the questionnaires.

2.7 Method of Data Analysis

Inferential statistics (one-sample t-test) and descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, standard deviation, mean deviation) were used in the data analysis process, employing the SPSS 24 package. Before applying the one-sample t-test, it was necessary to check whether the data set met the assumptions

required for the test. All the necessary assumptions were tested, and the data set fulfilled the requirements for the one-sample *t*-test. Therefore, this test was used to examine the hypotheses.

A one-sample *t*-test is commonly used when the test statistic, like other forms of *t*-tests, meets the assumption of normal distribution if the value of a scaling term in the test statistic is known. The test requires that the dependent variable follows a normal distribution. According to the central limit theorem (CLT), normal distribution can be assumed when sample means approximate a normal distribution. Sample sizes equal to or greater than 30 are often sufficient for the CLT to hold. In this case, the sample size meets the CLT assumption, making it appropriate to use a one-sample *t*-test.

Mean scores, particularly for theme two (possible barriers to participating in community service), were computed based on the Likert scale ratings. The mean score for any individual item was expected to fall between 1 and 5. Consequently, the means were interpreted against a neutral point of 3, which represents the middle of the rating scale. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), mean scores above 3 were considered favorable opinions, while mean scores below 3 were regarded as unfavorable for the given item. Therefore, the estimated value for testing the hypotheses in this study was 3, which represents a neutral or no-response position.

2.8 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses in this research aimed to determine whether there were significant differences in the barriers affecting instructors' ability to engage in community service. Accordingly, 10 null hypotheses were tested using a one-sample *t*-test. These are:

- **Hypothesis 1:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between lack of self-interest in carrying out community service and having self-interest in carrying out community service.*
- **Hypothesis 2:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between lack of time to carry out community service and lack of time not being an obstacle to carrying out community service.*
- **Hypothesis 3:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between lack of financial incentives as an obstacle to carrying out community service and lack of financial incentives not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 4:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between environmental fears or concerns about doing community service as an obstacle and environmental fears or concerns not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 5:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between poor community service atmosphere as an obstacle and poor community service atmosphere not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 6:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between having a heavy teaching load as an obstacle and a heavy teaching load not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 7:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between investing much time in administrative work as an obstacle and investing time in administrative work not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 8:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between lack of institutional support for community service as an obstacle and lack of institutional support not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 9:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between insufficient equipment/facilities for community service as an obstacle and insufficient equipment/facilities not being an obstacle.*
- **Hypothesis 10:** *There is no significant difference for instructors between willingness from stakeholders as an obstacle and willingness from stakeholders not being an obstacle.*

3 Results

3.1 Instructors Demographic Characteristics

Table 3: Respondents Background Information

S.No.	Variable	Response	N	%
1	Age	Below 25	8	2.5
		26-35	183	56.8
		35-45	114	35.4
		45-55	17	5.3
		Above 55	0	0
2	Gender	Male	263	81.7
		Female	59	18.3
3	Educational level	MSc	259	80.5
		PhD	59	18.3
		Post Doc	1	0.3
		Others	3	0.9
3	Academic experience (in Year)	2.48 ±1.233		
4	Involvement in Administration	Yes	181	56.2
		No	141	43.8
5	Academic Rank	Lecturer	223	69.3
		Asst. professor	82	25.5
		Associate Prof.	17	5.3
		Professor	0	0

From the output shown in Table 3, 183 respondents (56.8%) are between the ages of 25-35, indicating that over half of university instructors are of working age. The sample includes 263 males (81.7%) and 59 females (18.3%), for a total of 322 respondents. Regarding academic rank, 223 respondents (69.3%) are Lecturers, 82 (25.5%) are Assistant Professors, and 17 (5.3%) are Associate Profes-

sors. The average university experience among the respondents is 2.48 ± 1.233 years.

3.2 Participation in Community Service Activity

Instructors' participation in community service was assessed based on two major question items. Their perceived responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis for Instructors' Participation in Community Service activity

S.No.	Item questions	N	Response in %	
			Yes	No
1	Have you ever utilized your research output for community service	322	30.1	69.9
2	Provided training/ awareness creation measures	322	34.5	65.5

Table 4 revealed that the majority of participant instructors confirmed there is no effective utilization of research output for community service, with 69.9% providing no response to item 1. Similarly, in item 2, instructors indicated low participation in providing training, with 65.5% providing no response.

3.3 Possible Barriers to Participating in Community Service

Both descriptive statistics, including mean (M), standard deviation (Std. D), and percentage (%), as well as inferential statistics (one-sample *t*-test), were conducted to identify perceived barriers to participating in community service. The analysis focused on how significantly each factor contributed to these barriers.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis for Barriers to Participate in Community Service

S.No.	Possible factor Items	Response in Percent					M	Std. D.
		SD	D	NS	A	SA		
1	Lack of self-interest in carrying out community service	31.1	32.0	12.1	14.9	9.9	2.41	1.33
2	Lack of time in carrying out community service	19.88	35.09	17.70	13.04	14.29	2.79	2.01
3	Lack of financial incentives to carry out community service	8.39	18.94	11.18	31.68	29.81	3.56	1.32
4	There are/is env'tal fears or concerns about doing comm. service	18.01	23.29	31.06	17.08	10.56	2.79	1.23
5	Poor community service atmosphere	8.39	20.81	20.19	33.23	17.39	3.30	1.22
6	Heavy teaching load and schedule	14.91	26.09	18.32	23.91	16.77	3.02	1.33
7	Investing much time in administrative works	22.98	26.09	12.73	23.60	14.60	2.81	1.40
8	Lack of institutional support for community service	9.94	15.53	13.98	35.09	25.47	3.50	1.29
9	Insufficient equipment/ facilities for community service	6.52	16.15	10.25	45.03	22.05	3.60	1.18
10	Because of its charitably /willingness from stakeholders	9.63	18.01	21.74	34.16	16.46	3.30	1.22

N=322, SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, NS=Not Sure, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

The possible barriers perceived by instructors as factors affecting participation in community service were identified through the descriptive analysis shown in Table 5, based on the majority (50% or more) of respondents' agreement (A + SA) or disagreement (D + SD) across 10-factor question items.

Respondents' Agreement (A + SA):

- Lack of financial incentives to carry out community service (item-3, 61.49%).
- Poor community service atmosphere (item-5, 50.62%).
- Lack of institutional support for community service (item-8, 60.56%).
- Insufficient equipment/facilities for community service (item-9, 67.08%).

- Charitability or willingness from stakeholders (item-10, 50.62%).

Respondents' Disagreement (D + SD):

- Lack of self-interest in carrying out community service (item-1, 63.1%) was not considered a factor.
- Lack of time to carry out community service (item-2, 54.97%) was also not perceived as a barrier by instructors.

Additionally, a one-sample *t*-test was conducted to assess the significance of each factor as a barrier to participating in community service. The results of the one-sample *t*-test are presented in Table 6, which corresponds to the testing of the 10 null hypotheses outlined in Section 2.8.

Table 6: One-sample *t*-test regarding barriers to participate in community service

S. No.	Variables	Test Value = 3			
		Mean Diff	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Lack of self-interest in carrying out community service	-0.59	-8.02	321	0.00
2	Lack of time in carrying out community service	-0.21	-1.86	321	0.07
3	Lack of financial incentives to carrying out community service	0.56	7.58	321	0.00
4	Environmental fears or concerns about doing community service	-0.21	-3.09	321	0.00
5	Poor community service atmosphere	0.30	4.48	321	0.00
6	Heavy teaching load and schedule	0.02	0.21	321	0.83
7	Investing much time in administrative works	-0.19	-2.46	321	0.01
8	Lack of institutional support for community service	0.51	6.99	321	0.00
9	Insufficient equipment/ facilities for community service	0.60	9.09	321	0.00
10	Because of its charitably /willingness from stakeholders	0.30	4.40	321	0.00

The one-sample *t*-test results reject eight null hypotheses regarding barriers to participating in community service:

Item 1: Lack of self-interest in carrying out community service ($M = 2.41$, Std. $D = 1.33$, $t(321) = -8.02$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 3: Lack of financial incentives for carrying out community service ($M = 3.56$, Std. $D = 1.32$, $t(321) = 7.58$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 4: Environmental fears or concerns about doing community service ($M = 2.79$, Std. $D = 1.23$, $t(321) = -3.09$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 5: Poor community service atmosphere ($M = 3.30$, Std. $D = 1.22$, $t(321) = 4.48$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 7: Spending too much time on administrative work ($M = 2.81$, Std. $D = 1.40$, $t(321) = -2.46$, $p = 0.01 < .05$).

Item 8: Lack of institutional support for community service ($M = 3.50$, Std. $D = 1.29$, $t(321) = 6.99$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 9: Insufficient equipment/facilities for community service ($M = 3.60$, Std. $D = 1.18$, $t(321) = 9.09$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

Item 10: Lack of charitable willingness from stakeholders ($M = 3.30$, Std. $D = 1.22$, $t(321) = 4.40$, $p = 0.00 < .05$).

All eight variables are significant factors viewed by the instructors as barriers to participating in community service. However, the relative importance of these variables is determined using the mean differences compared to the test value of 3 (the neutral or no response position).

Based on this, the results indicate five variables with positive mean differences: **Item 3** (lack of financial incentives for carrying out community service), **Item 5** (poor community service atmosphere), **Item 8** (lack of institutional support for community service), **Item 9** (insufficient equipment/facilities for community service), and **Item 10** (lack of charitable willingness from stakeholders). This suggests that instructors view these five variables as more important barriers to participating in community service.

4 Discussions

This discussion is guided by two major research questions.

RQ1: To what extent do university instructors participate in community service activities?

To answer this research question, the findings in Table 4 are used. Instructors' participation in community service activities is remarkably low, indicating that universities are not effectively engaging in one of the key pillars of activities: community service. However, university engagement in community service activities is mandatory, as noted by Damons *et al.* (2018). In Ethiopian higher education institutions (HEIs), community service is one of the major objectives. More importantly, as noted in Adekalu *et al.* (2018), promoting the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural development of communities in one's country is challenged in the absence of community service practices.

RQ2: What are the challenges (if any) instructors face as barriers to participating in community service activities?

To answer this important question, both the descriptive results in Table 5 and hypothesis testing are utilized to see how significantly each factor contributes to the low engagement of instructors in community service activities. From Table 5, we can list the following factors perceived by instructors as more significant than others: lack of financial incentives, poor community service atmosphere, lack of institutional support, insufficient equipment/facilities, and lack of willingness from stakeholders.

Moreover, the one-sample *t*-test identified significant factors that challenge community service practices. Referring to the results in Table 6 from hypothesis testing, the lack of self-interest, lack of financial incentives, environmental fears or concerns, poor community service atmosphere, excessive time spent on administrative tasks, lack of institutional support, insufficient equipment, and lack of willingness from stakeholders are significant barriers challenging instructors to participate in community service activities. These findings are consistent with the literature, which highlights

a lack of interest and motivation (Adekalu *et al.*, 2017; Colbeck and Michael, 2006) and a poor reward system (Gorski and Mehta, 2016) as challenging factors for instructors to engage in community service. A lack of institutional attention to community service activities has been identified as a challenge for academics (Adekalu *et al.*, 2017; Adekalu *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, administrative involvement or extra responsibilities are also challenges, as indicated in Adekalu *et al.* (2017), Terosky *et al.* (2014), and Ziker (2014).

5 Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, we have determined that community service programs are somewhat limited among the Ethiopian public colleges we studied. The current study identified several variables that prevent instructors from participating in community service projects. Significant obstacles include inadequate equipment, a lack of interest on the part of instructors, a lack of institutional support, a lack of willingness from stakeholders, a poor environment for community service (including policies), and a significant time commitment to administrative duties. According to the current study, one of the mainstays of university community service programs needs to be reformed. If the relationship between the community and the university does not improve, then one of the universities' missions is not being met.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the current study, the following recommendations are made:

- Universities need to improve the existing reward system to attract instructors to community service activities.
- Continuous institutional support for instructors involved in community service activities can promote these practices.
- Strong community service policies should be established, similar to research and teaching policies, to make participation in community service mandatory for instructors.
- Improving the quality and quantity of equipment important for community service activities

will enhance the effectiveness of these activities.

- Ongoing awareness creation for stakeholders and communities is required to improve the community-university connection.
- To minimize the time instructors spend on administrative tasks, a guiding policy should be implemented that delineates the proportion of tasks for community service alongside their administrative responsibilities.

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