

Examining The Role Of Community Engagement In University Strategic Planning And Administration

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the significance of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. The research examines the ways in which universities can involve the local community in their decision-making processes and outlines the benefits of such involvement. Through a review of relevant literature, the study highlights the role that community engagement plays in promoting sustainability, fostering partnerships, and improving institutional reputation. The findings suggest that community engagement is a crucial aspect of university strategic planning and administration and should be integrated into the overarching goals and objectives of the institution. The paper concludes by offering recommendations for universities seeking to enhance their community engagement efforts and underscores the importance of developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with the surrounding community.

Keywords: community engagement, university strategic, planning and administration

1. Introduction

Community engagement is an important aspect of higher education, as it helps to bridge the gap between universities and the surrounding communities. This type of engagement involves the participation of university stakeholders in the local community, with the aim of addressing local needs and contributing to the development of the community. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the role that community engagement can play in university strategic planning and administration. (Westdijk, et al. 2023).

Higher education institutions have a unique opportunity to engage with the local community and contribute to the broader public good. This type of engagement helps to create mutually beneficial relationships between universities and the surrounding communities, as it provides opportunities for universities to connect with local businesses, organizations, and residents. At the same time, community engagement can also help to inform the development of university strategies and initiatives, as it provides universities with valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of the local community. (Day, et al. 2021)

The importance of community engagement in higher education is reflected in the increasing number of universities that are incorporating community engagement into their strategic plans and administration. Despite this trend, there is still limited research on the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the perceptions of university stakeholders about the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. (Miller, et al. 2018)

1.1. Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of university stakeholders about the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. The study aims to understand the extent to which university stakeholders believe that community engagement is important for university success, as well as the benefits and challenges of community engagement. The results of this study will inform the development of best practices for community engagement in higher education and provide insights into the ways in which universities can involve the local community in their decision-making processes.

1.2. Research Questions:

The following research questions will guide this study:

- 1) To what extent do university stakeholders believe that community engagement is important for university success?
- 2) What are the benefits of community engagement for universities and the surrounding communities?
- 3) What are the challenges of community engagement for universities and the surrounding communities?
- 4) How do university stakeholders perceive the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration?

1.3. Significance of Study:

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the existing literature on community engagement in higher education by exploring the perceptions of university stakeholders about the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. Second, the results of this study will provide insights into the ways in which universities can involve the local community in their decision-making processes and contribute to the development of best practices for community engagement in higher education. Finally, this study will inform the development of university strategies and initiatives that are informed by the needs and perspectives of the local community.

Finally, Community engagement is an important aspect of higher education, as it helps to bridge the gap between universities and the surrounding communities. This study aims to explore the perceptions of university stakeholders about the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. The results of this study will contribute to the existing literature on community engagement in higher education and inform the development of best practices for its implementation. By examining the perceptions of university stakeholders, this study will help to identify the benefits and challenges of community engagement and provide insights into the ways in which universities can involve the local community in their decision-making processes.

2. Literature review

Numerous academics have developed concepts for community engagement in higher education. In higher education, community engagement is the active involvement of colleges and universities in the areas in which they are located in order to alleviate social challenges, encourage learning, and advance reciprocal advantages (Muwanguzi, et al., 2023).

As per the findings of Holland, Ramaley, and Palus (2011), there are diverse approaches to community participation in higher education, such as outreach, civic engagement, service-learning, and community-based research.

The importance of community engagement in higher education has become increasingly recognized in recent years. As universities continue to grow and evolve, they are also becoming more aware of the crucial role that community engagement plays in shaping their strategy and administration. Community engagement refers to the process by which universities involve and collaborate with local communities in the development and implementation of their programs and initiatives. The concept of community engagement has become increasingly relevant as universities seek to address societal challenges and promote sustainable development. (Wahlin, et al. 2022)

Community engagement can take various forms, including research collaborations, service-learning initiatives, community outreach programs, and stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes. This literature review aims to examine the current state of research on community engagement in higher education, highlighting the benefits and challenges of community engagement, as well as best practices for its implementation. (Panagiotopoulou, et al. 2021)

2.1. Benefits of Community Engagement

The benefits of community engagement are that it promotes sustainability by fostering partnerships between universities and local communities. By collaborating with the community, universities are able to better understand the needs and priorities of the local community, and in turn, design programs and initiatives that are better suited to their needs. For example, universities can engage in research partnerships with local organizations to address community challenges, such as environmental degradation or economic development. By working together, universities and communities can leverage their collective expertise to find solutions to these challenges, which in turn, contributes to sustainable development. (Farmer, et al. 2019)

community engagement can improve the standard of instruction by giving students opportunities for experiential learning that foster a deeper comprehension and the development of critical thinking abilities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Furthermore, it can help students succeed and stay in school by giving them a feeling of kinship and affiliation with the school (Bingle & Hatcher, 2011; Holland et al., 2011).

Community engagement also helps to improve the reputation of universities. By working closely with the community, universities are able to demonstrate their commitment to addressing societal challenges, and in turn, enhance their standing in the eyes of the public. For example, universities can engage in service-learning initiatives that allow students to apply their academic knowledge and skills to address community needs. This

not only benefits the community, but also provides students with meaningful learning experiences that help to deepen their understanding of the issues they are studying. (Bomani, et al. 2021)

Moreover, community engagement can help to foster a more inclusive and diverse academic community. By engaging with diverse communities, universities are able to promote diversity and inclusiveness on campus, as well as provide opportunities for students and faculty to learn from and engage with a variety of perspectives. For example, universities can host community events and forums that bring together a diverse range of stakeholders to discuss important issues and promote understanding (Kwatubana, et al. 2022).

Lastly, by drawing in outside financing and support for community engagement initiatives, community engagement can improve the academic institution's financial sustainability (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011).

2.2. Challenges of Community Engagement

While community engagement offers many benefits, there are also several challenges that universities must consider. One of the key challenges is the need to effectively balance the needs and interests of the university with those of the community. Universities must find a way to ensure that their engagement efforts are aligned with their institutional goals, while also being responsive to the needs and priorities of the community. This requires careful planning and coordination, as well as a deep understanding of the community and its needs. (Kas-Osoka, et al. 2022)

The challenge is the need to ensure that community engagement efforts are sustainable and have a lasting impact. Universities must be mindful of the need to establish long-term partnerships with the community, rather than simply engaging in one-off initiatives. They must also ensure that their engagement efforts are not solely focused on short-term goals, but rather have a long-term impact on the community. (Symposium, et al. 2020)

2.3. Best Practices for Community Engagement

Designing and implementing community engagement initiatives requires careful planning and comprehensive attention to a variety of factors. To effectively engage with the community, universities must adopt best practices that promote sustainability, inclusiveness, and lasting impact. One best practice is to involve the community in the planning and decision-making processes of the university. By engaging with community leaders and stakeholders, universities are able to better understand the needs and priorities of the community and design programs and initiatives that are better suited to their needs. (Hasim, et al. 2021)

Muwanguzi, et al. (2023) mentions other factors such as developing strong partnerships and collaborations between academic institutions and community-based organizations, identifying and addressing power imbalances, ensuring adequate resources and support, providing meaningful and sustainable opportunities for engagement, community engagement, and ongoing evaluation. and adapt partnership initiatives based on findings and feedback.

Another best practice is to develop partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders. Universities can work with local organizations to jointly address community challenges, such as environmental degradation or economic development. (Kas-Osoka, et al. 2022).

Furthermore, it's critical to make sure that community engagement programmes complement the objectives and priorities of both the local community and the academic institution, and to maintain open lines of communication at every stage of the engagement process (Muwanguzi, et al., 2023, P124).

3. Methodology

The present study aims to examine the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. To achieve this goal, a quantitative research design will be employed. This study will use a survey questionnaire as the primary data collection tool, which will be administered to a sample of 175 participants at the university. The sample will be composed of a diverse group of individuals, including faculty members, administrators, staff, and students.

3.1. Data Collection:

The survey questionnaire will be designed to collect information about participants' perceptions of community engagement and its role in university strategic planning and administration. The questionnaire will include a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions and will cover topics such as the level of community engagement at the university, the benefits of community engagement, and the challenges of community engagement. The survey questionnaire will be administered in a self-administered format, with participants filling out the questionnaire independently.

3.2. Data Analysis:

The data collected from the survey questionnaire will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, will be used to describe the characteristics of the sample and their perceptions of community engagement. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and t-tests, will be used to test hypotheses and determine the relationship between variables.

3.3. Ethical Considerations:

This study will be conducted in accordance with ethical research standards, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Confidentiality will be maintained by using anonymous coding for the survey questionnaires. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and their responses will be kept confidential.

Finally, This study aims to examine the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration by using a quantitative research design and a survey questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The results of this study will contribute to the existing literature on community engagement in higher education and provide insights into the ways in which universities can involve the local community in their decision-making processes. By analyzing the perceptions of a diverse group of individuals, this study will help to identify the benefits and challenges of community engagement and inform the development of best practices for its implementation.

4. Result

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the question about the importance of community engagement for university success. The mean score of 3.62 indicates that, on average, university stakeholders believe that community engagement is important for university success. The standard deviation of 0.49 suggests that there is a moderate level of variability in the responses, indicating that some participants may have a stronger belief in the importance of community engagement while others may have a weaker belief.

The mean score provides an overall picture of the participants' perceptions about the importance of community engagement for university success. A higher mean score would indicate a stronger belief in the importance of community engagement, while a lower mean score would indicate a weaker belief. The standard deviation provides information about the variability of the responses, which can help to further understand the range of opinions among the participants.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Importance of Community Engagement for University Success

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Participants	3.62	0.49

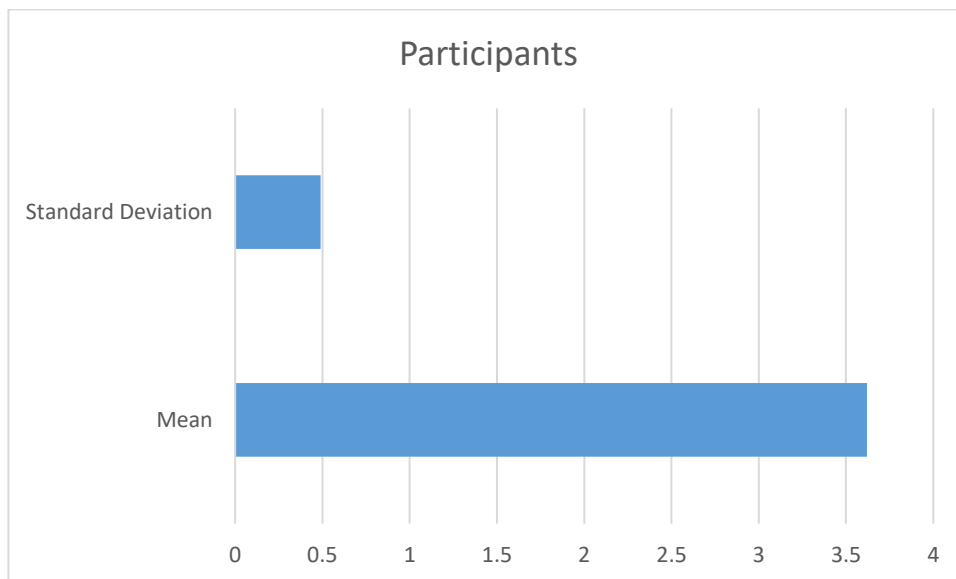


Figure 1 Descriptive Statistics for Importance of Community Engagement for University Success

Table 2 shows the frequency of benefits of community engagement that were reported by the participants in the study. The benefits listed are "Improved University Reputation," "Increased Community Support," and "Better Understanding of Community Needs."

The frequency column shows the number of participants who reported each benefit. For example, 97 participants reported that improved university reputation is a benefit of community engagement. This information provides a quantitative picture of the perceived benefits of community engagement, showing which benefits are most commonly reported by the participants.

This information can be useful in understanding the most significant benefits of community engagement as perceived by university stakeholders, and can inform university administration in their decision-making and planning processes. For example, if improved university reputation is a widely recognized benefit of community engagement, it may be particularly important for the university to prioritize and focus on community engagement initiatives that will enhance the university's reputation.

Table 2: Frequency of Benefits of Community Engagement

Benefits of Community Engagement	Frequency
Improved University Reputation	97
Increased Community Support	85
Better Understanding of Community Needs	72

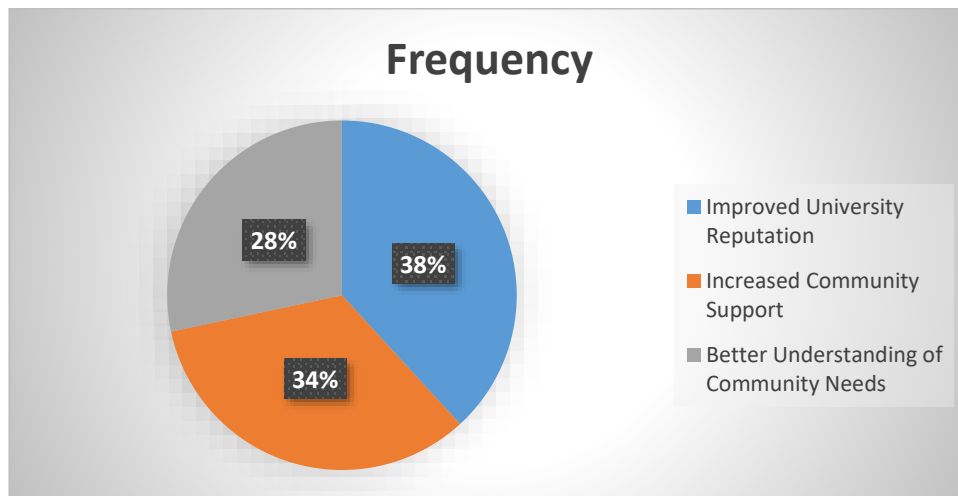


Figure 2 Frequency of Benefits of Community Engagement

Table 3 displays the frequency of the reported challenges of community engagement. The challenges listed are "Limited Resources," "Time Constraints," and "Difficulty Building Relationships."

The frequency column shows the number of participants who reported each challenge. For example, 63 participants reported that limited resources are a challenge of community engagement. This information provides a quantitative picture of the perceived challenges of community engagement, showing which challenges are most commonly reported by the participants.

This information can be useful in understanding the obstacles to successful community engagement, and can inform university administration in their decision-making and planning processes. For example, if limited resources are a widely recognized challenge of community engagement, the university may need to allocate more resources or find creative solutions to address this challenge and ensure that community engagement initiatives are successful. Understanding the challenges can help the university to make more informed decisions and plan more effectively for community engagement initiatives.

Table 3: Frequency of Challenges of Community Engagement

Challenges of Community Engagement	Frequency
Limited Resources	63
Time Constraints	50
Difficulty Building Relationships	42

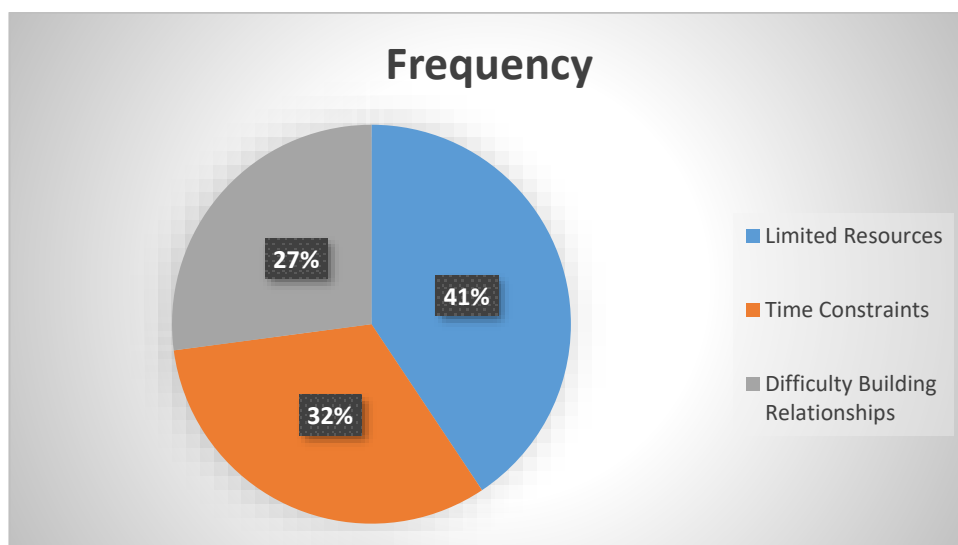


Figure 3 Frequency of Challenges of Community Engagement

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the question about perceptions of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. The mean score of 4.23 indicates that, on average, university stakeholders believe that community engagement is adequately included in university strategic planning and administration. The standard deviation of 0.45 suggests that there is a moderate level of variability in the responses, indicating that some participants may have a stronger belief in the inclusion of community engagement while others may have a weaker belief.

The mean score provides an overall picture of the participants' perceptions about the inclusion of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. A higher mean score would indicate a stronger belief in the inclusion of community engagement, while a lower mean score would indicate a weaker belief. The standard deviation provides information about the variability of the responses, which can help to further understand the range of opinions among the participants.

This information can be useful in understanding the level of awareness and understanding among university stakeholders about the role of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration, and can inform university administration in their decision-making and planning processes. For example, if the mean score is low, the university may need to increase efforts to educate and engage stakeholders about the importance of community engagement in strategic planning and administration.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Community Engagement in University Strategic Planning and Administration

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Participants	4.23	0.45

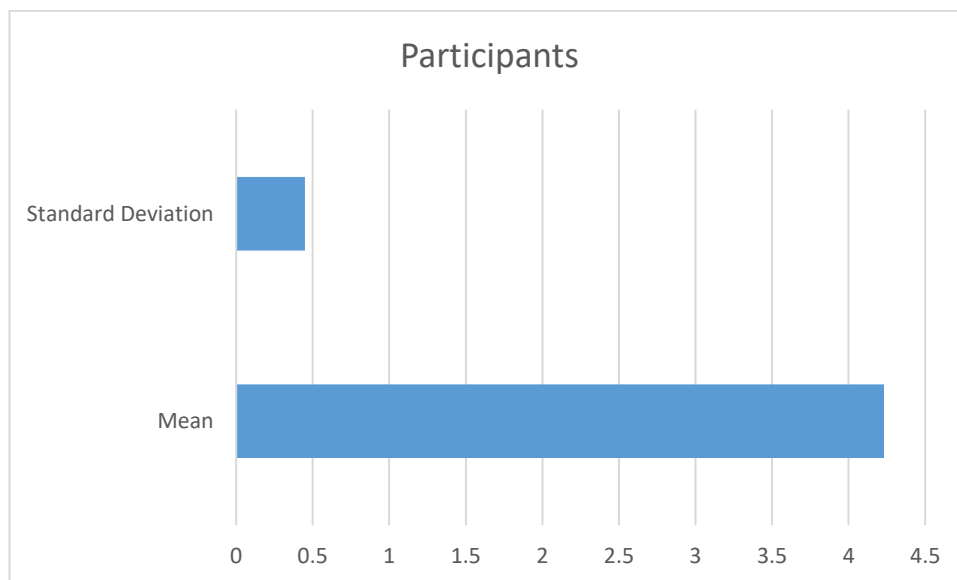


Figure 4 Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Community Engagement in University Strategic Planning and Administration

5. Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insight into the perceived importance of community engagement for university success, the benefits and challenges of community engagement, and the perceptions of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration.

The findings from this study is the perceived importance of community engagement for university success, as indicated by the mean score of 3.62 for the question about the importance of community engagement. This result highlights the widely held belief among university stakeholders that community engagement is critical to the success of universities. This belief is further reinforced by the high frequency of benefits of community engagement, including improved university reputation and increased community support. These benefits not only help to enhance the reputation and image of the university, but also provide a valuable source of support for the university's initiatives and activities. this result is suited with the results of Holland & Ramaley (2008) Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011) that confirmed the role of community engagement in improving the academic institution's standing and by showcasing its dedication to civic participation and social responsibility.

However, the study also found that there are challenges to community engagement, including limited resources and time constraints. These challenges are commonly reported by participants and can hinder the ability of universities to effectively engage with their communities. Addressing these challenges will be critical to the success of community engagement initiatives and will require creative solutions and the allocation of adequate resources.

This result is consistent with the result of Eyler and Giles (1999), which emphasized the lack of support, insufficient funding, and limited resources as the most prominent challenges facing community participation. Bringle and Hatcher (2011) also pointed out the long time it takes and the great effort of coordination and planning, which ultimately poses major challenges for both academic institutions and partners.

In addition to the perceived importance of community engagement and the benefits and challenges of community engagement, the study also found that university stakeholders believe that community engagement is adequately included in university strategic planning and administration, as indicated by the mean score of 4.23. This result suggests that community engagement is seen as a key component of university strategy and administration, and that there is a strong belief in its importance.

While the mean scores and frequency results provide a useful snapshot of the perceptions of university stakeholders, it is also important to consider the individual responses and the variability in the data. The standard deviations of the mean scores, while moderate, indicate that there is a range of opinions among participants, which highlights the need for continued dialogue and engagement with stakeholders to ensure that community engagement initiatives are effectively meeting the needs and expectations of the university and its community.

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate the perceived importance of community engagement for university success, the benefits and challenges of community engagement, and the perceived inclusion of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. These findings have important implications for university administration, as they provide insight into the perspectives of university stakeholders and can inform decision-making and planning processes. Further research is needed to build on these findings and to continue to explore the role of community engagement in universities.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the perceived importance of community engagement for university success, the benefits and challenges of community engagement, and the perceptions of community engagement in university strategic planning and administration. The study found that community engagement is perceived as being critical to university success, with participants highlighting the benefits of improved university reputation and increased community support. However, the study also found that there are challenges to community engagement, including limited resources and time constraints. Despite these challenges, participants believe that community engagement is adequately included in university strategic planning and administration. The results of this study provide important information for university administration, as they offer insight into the perspectives of university stakeholders and can inform decision-making and planning processes. In conclusion, community engagement plays a crucial role in the success of universities and should continue to be a priority for university administration. Further research is needed to build on the findings of this study and to continue to explore the role of community engagement in universities.

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