

Community Engagement Experiences of Faculty and Staff in the Implementation of Extension Programs: Evidence from a Private Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

Community engagement is an essential function of higher education institutions, enabling faculty and staff to contribute their expertise to community development while strengthening professional and institutional capacities. This study explored the lived experiences of faculty and administrative staff involved in implementing community extension programs in a private higher education institution in the Philippines. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study purposively selected participants with direct experience in planning, coordinating, implementing, monitoring, or evaluating extension initiatives. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that participants experienced community engagement as a transformative professional practice characterized by cultivating a culture of community engagement, bridging academic expertise and community practice, experiencing reciprocal learning and personal fulfillment, and building sustainable community partnerships. Participants also encountered challenges related to resource constraints, diverse community contexts, competing academic and administrative responsibilities, and the need for sustained institutional support. Overall, community extension participation strengthened participants' professional identity, leadership competence, social responsibility, and commitment to public service. The study highlights the importance of institutionalizing community engagement as a shared and sustainable responsibility rather than treating it as a supplementary activity or compliance requirement.

Keywords: community engagement, extension service, faculty and staff experiences, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement has become a defining function of higher education institutions (HEIs), reflecting the growing expectation that schools contribute to social transformation, sustainable development, and civic advancement beyond their traditional mandates of instruction and research. Contemporary higher education increasingly recognizes community engagement as a collaborative process that fosters reciprocal partnerships, co-creation of knowledge, and meaningful social impact. Through community extension programs and service-learning initiatives, institutions establish avenues for faculty and staff to apply professional expertise in authentic community settings while simultaneously enhancing institutional relevance and societal responsiveness (Bringle & Clayton, 2021; Schultes et al., 2025). Recent empirical evidence suggests that well-designed community engagement initiatives contribute significantly to institutional effectiveness and stakeholder development. A meta-analysis of community-engaged learning demonstrated that participation in community-based initiatives promotes thriving, social connectedness, and holistic development among participants in higher education contexts (Guanlao et al., 2025). Similarly, mandatory academic service-learning has been shown to strengthen civic engagement and sustained commitment to community participation by facilitating meaningful interactions with diverse populations and real-world social issues (Lin et al., 2025). These findings suggest that community engagement serves not only as a mechanism for delivering social services but also as a transformative educational and professional practice.

Higher education institutions worldwide have increasingly adopted community engagement as a strategic approach for addressing complex societal challenges and advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, reciprocity has emerged as a central principle in effective community engagement, emphasizing that communities are not passive recipients of services but active partners in the creation of knowledge and solutions. Delaine et al. (2024) found that reciprocal relationships enhance the quality, equity, and sustainability of service-learning initiatives, underscoring the importance of mutual learning and shared decision-making between institution and communities. Within higher education institutions, faculty members serve as key prime mover in translating academic knowledge into practical interventions that respond to community needs. At the same time, administrative personnel and extension practitioners provide essential organizational support, program coordination, and partnership management necessary to sustain extension initiatives. Recent studies demonstrate that participation in community engagement enhances professional competence, leadership capacity, collaborative skills, and civic identity among institution personnel (Schultes et al., 2025; Do, 2024). Additionally, studies examining faculty involvement in service-learning reveal that engagement with communities promotes empathy, reflective practice, and leadership development while strengthening educators' roles as facilitators of social change.

In the Philippine context, community extension remains one of the three core functions of higher education institutions, alongside instruction and research. Guided by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), institutions are encouraged to implement responsive, inclusive, and sustainable extension programs that address local needs (Garcia & Uy, 2025). As a result, many private higher education institutions have institutionalized community extension programs as strategic platforms for promoting social responsibility and strengthening community relationships. Despite these institutional efforts, the lived experiences of those directly responsible for implementing these programs remain insufficiently understood. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on student outcomes, community impact, and program effectiveness, with relatively fewer studies examining the experiences of faculty and staff involved in planning, coordinating, and implementing community extension initiatives. While previous studies have highlighted the benefits of service-learning and community engagement, there remains a scarcity of research exploring how faculty and staff navigate the personal, professional, and organizational dimensions of extension work, particularly within private higher education institutions. Moreover, faculty and staff are frequently studied independently, overlooking the collaborative and complementary nature of their roles in sustaining community engagement efforts.

Addressing these gaps, the present study explores the lived experiences of faculty and staff involved in implementing community extension programs in a private higher education institution in the Philippines. Using a phenomenological lens, the study examines how participants construct meaning from their community engagement experiences, negotiate the challenges encountered throughout implementation, and perceive the influence of these experiences on their personal and professional development. By illuminating the human dimensions of community extension practice, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on community engagement and offers context-specific insights that may inform institutional policy, faculty and staff development programs, and the design of sustainable extension initiatives.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of faculty and staff involved in implementing community extension programs in a private higher education institution. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their lived experiences by examining the essence of a shared phenomenon. Rather than measuring predetermined variables, the approach focuses on participants' perceptions, reflections, and meanings as they experience a particular phenomenon within their natural contexts. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand how faculty and staff experienced community engagement, interpreted the challenges encountered during program implementation, and perceived its influence on their professional and personal development. The study adopted Creswell's phenomenological approach, which emphasizes describing the common meaning of participants lived experiences through in-depth exploration and thematic interpretation. Following this approach, the researcher

practiced reflexivity throughout the research process by recognizing and setting aside personal assumptions as much as possible to allow participants' voices and experiences to emerge authentically during data analysis.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Philippine College Foundation, a private higher education institution in Valencia City, Bukidnon, Philippines. The institution actively implements community extension programs as part of its commitment to instruction, research, and extension, aligning with the Commission on Higher Education's mandate to promote socially responsive and community-oriented higher education. The institution regularly conducts extension initiatives focusing on education, health promotion, environmental sustainability, livelihood development, disaster preparedness, gender and development, and community capacity-building in collaboration with local government units, non-government organizations, and community stakeholders. These extension activities provided an appropriate context for exploring the lived experiences of faculty and staff who actively participate in community engagement.

Research Participants

The participants consisted of ten (10) faculty members and administrative staff who had actively participated in the planning, implementation, coordination, monitoring, or evaluation of community extension programs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit information-rich participants capable of providing comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants were selected using the following inclusion criteria:

1. Currently employed as a faculty member or administrative staff member of the institution;
2. Had participated in at least three (3) institutional community extension program within the previous two academic years;
3. Possessed direct experience in planning, implementing, coordinating, or evaluating extension activities; and
4. Voluntarily agreed to participate through informed consent.

Sampling continued until data saturation was achieved, that is, when no substantially new meanings or themes emerged from subsequent interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, ethical approval and institutional permission were secured from the appropriate school authorities. Eligible participants were informed about the objectives of the study, confidentiality procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained before the conduct of interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences openly while ensuring consistency across interview sessions. An interview guide containing broad, open-ended questions was developed based on the study objectives and validated by qualitative research experts before implementation. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted at a time and location convenient for the participants. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. Field notes were likewise maintained to capture contextual observations, non-verbal expressions, and researcher reflections that complemented the interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview. Data analysis followed Creswell's adaptation of phenomenological analysis, which involves repeated reading of transcripts, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of related meanings into themes, and synthesis of the essential structure of the lived experience.

The analysis proceeded through the following stages:

1. Familiarization with the interview transcripts through repeated reading;
2. Identification of significant statements related to participants' experiences;
3. Coding of meaningful units;
4. Clustering of related codes into categories;
5. Development of overarching themes representing the essence of participants' experiences; and
6. Interpretation and synthesis of themes in relation to existing literature and the study objectives.

To enhance analytical rigor, coding and thematic interpretation were conducted iteratively, allowing themes to emerge inductively from participants' narratives rather than being imposed a priori.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The rigor of the study was established using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and the use of verbatim quotations to accurately represent participants' experiences. Member checking involved providing participants with summaries of their interview responses to verify the accuracy of interpretation. Transferability was established by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained through comprehensive documentation of the research procedures, coding decisions, and thematic development, creating an audit trail that enhanced the consistency and transparency of the research process. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, documentation of analytical decisions, and continual examination of researcher assumptions to minimize potential bias throughout data collection and interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing qualitative research. Institutional approval was obtained before data collection commenced. Participants received detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without consequence. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms or participant codes (e.g., F1, F2, S1, S2) were assigned during transcription and reporting. All interview recordings, transcripts, and related research documents were stored in password-protected electronic files accessible only to the researchers. Personal identifiers were removed from all research records to safeguard participants' privacy and confidentiality. The researchers likewise practiced reflexivity throughout the investigation by acknowledging personal assumptions and ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives rather than researcher expectations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Faculty and Staff in the Implementation of Community Extension Programs

The lived experiences of faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs reveal how sustained engagement with partner communities shapes their professional roles, institutional commitment, and personal development. Analysis of the participants' narratives generated four interrelated themes that capture the essence of their experiences: (1) Cultivating a Culture of Community Engagement, (2) Bridging Academic Expertise and Community Practice, (3) Experiencing Reciprocal Learning and Personal Fulfillment, and (4) Building Sustainable Community Partnerships.

Cultivating a Culture of Community Engagement

Community engagement emerged as the central and defining lived experience shared by both faculty and staff involved in implementing community extension programs. Participants consistently described their involvement as extending beyond institutional obligations, viewing it instead as a meaningful commitment to improving the lives of community members. Their narratives reveal that continuous participation in extension activities fostered a collective culture of service grounded in social responsibility, collaboration, and shared purpose. Regardless of

professional designation, participants perceived community engagement as an integral component of higher education's mission to contribute to societal development.

Faculty participants described community engagement as an opportunity to extend the transformative power of education beyond classroom instruction. One faculty member reflected: *"Whenever I participate in community extension activities, I am reminded that education should not only remain inside the classroom but must reach those whose lives can truly be changed by it."* (F3) Similarly, another participant explained: *"Sharing knowledge with community members gives deeper meaning to my role as an educator because I see how learning becomes a tool for empowerment."* (F1) These narratives illustrate that faculty members regarded community engagement as a meaningful extension of their educational mission. Their experiences suggest that teaching becomes more meaningful when academic expertise is translated into practical interventions that address authentic community concerns.

Administrative staff expressed remarkably similar experiences, although from different institutional responsibilities. One staff participant shared: *"Being part of extension activities makes me genuinely happy because I know I am contributing, even in small ways, to the growth of others."* (S4) Likewise, another staff member remarked: *"I feel proud knowing that the programs we organize create positive change."* (S2) These accounts demonstrate that staff members also perceived community engagement as a source of personal fulfillment and institutional purpose. Although their contributions centered on program coordination, logistical support, and organizational management, participants recognized that these responsibilities were equally essential in achieving meaningful community outcomes. Faculty and staff shared a common understanding that successful community engagement depends upon collective institutional commitment rather than individual effort.

The findings corroborate those of Schultes et al. (2025), who reported that institutional commitment and collaborative participation among faculty, administrative personnel, and community stakeholders are fundamental to the successful implementation of service-learning and community engagement initiatives. Their evaluation demonstrated that when community engagement is embedded within institutional culture, it strengthens professional commitment, organizational collaboration, and the sustainability of extension programs. This supports the present finding that faculty and staff collectively embraced community engagement as a shared institutional value rather than an isolated responsibility. The participants' experiences are likewise consistent with Celio et al. (2011), which demonstrated that sustained engagement in service-learning enhances civic responsibility, interpersonal development, and social awareness through authentic community interactions. Finally, the present findings resonate with Guanlao et al. (2025), who found that community-engaged learning promotes participants' thriving, social connectedness, and holistic development within higher education. The authors concluded that authentic engagement with communities strengthens individuals' sense of purpose while fostering reciprocal learning between universities and community partners. This empirical evidence reinforces the participants' accounts that community engagement not only benefited partner communities but also enriched their own professional and personal experiences.

Bridging Academic Expertise and Community Practice

Bridging academic expertise and community practice emerged as a significant lived experience among faculty and staff involved in implementing community extension programs. Participants consistently described community engagement as an opportunity to transform disciplinary knowledge, technical competencies, and institutional resources into practical interventions that directly addressed the needs of partner communities. Rather than perceiving extension as a one-way dissemination of knowledge, participants experienced it as an interactive process in which academic expertise was continuously refined through collaboration with community members. Their narratives revealed that meaningful extension work enabled them to contextualize theoretical knowledge, develop practical solutions to local concerns, and appreciate the reciprocal relationship between institutional learning and community realities.

Faculty participants emphasized that community extension provided opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in authentic community settings. Through direct interaction with beneficiaries, they recognized that education became more meaningful when professional expertise translated into tangible improvements in people's lives. One faculty participant shared: *"Community extension gave me the opportunity to apply what I teach in the*

classroom to actual community situations. It is fulfilling to see that the knowledge I share helps community members solve everyday problems and improve their quality of life." (F7) Similarly, another faculty member reflected: "Extension activities challenged me to go beyond theoretical discussions. They encouraged me to adapt my professional expertise to the needs of the community, making learning more practical, relevant, and responsive." (F5) Their experiences demonstrate that knowledge acquired within the institution gains greater significance when applied collaboratively to address authentic community issues. Directly with community members, participants expanded their professional perspectives and recognized that effective extension requires adaptability, contextual understanding, and responsiveness to local realities rather than reliance on standardized academic approaches alone.

Administrative staff likewise experienced community extension as an opportunity to apply their professional competencies in ways that directly supported community development. Although their responsibilities primarily involved program coordination, communication, logistics, and resource management, participants recognized that these functions were indispensable in ensuring the successful implementation of extension initiatives. One staff participant explained: "Although my role is focused on coordinating programs and providing administrative support, I realized that every task I perform contributes to the success of our extension initiatives. Seeing the positive impact on the community gives meaning to my work." (S3) Another staff member shared: "Working closely with faculty members and community partners helped me understand that extension is a collaborative effort. Everyone has a role to play, and by working together, we can provide services that truly respond to the community's needs." (S5). These accounts demonstrate that administrative staff also bridged institutional expertise with community practice through effective coordination and collaborative implementation. Their experiences reveal that successful community extension depends not only on disciplinary knowledge but also on organizational efficiency, teamwork, and sustained communication among institutional personnel and community stakeholders.

Faculty and staff collectively recognized that meaningful extension programs emerge when academic expertise and administrative support function collaboratively to achieve shared development goals. The present findings are supported by contemporary empirical research emphasizing the integration of academic knowledge and community engagement. Salam et al. (2022) concluded that service-learning bridges academic learning with real-world practice by enabling participants to apply disciplinary knowledge in community contexts while simultaneously developing civic responsibility, problem-solving skills, and collaborative competence. Similarly, Pinto and Costa-Ramvalho (2023) found that participants involved in service-learning demonstrated significant improvements in applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations, strengthening their reflective practice and capacity to address complex social issues. Their study highlighted that authentic engagement with communities transforms academic learning into socially relevant action through continuous interaction and contextualized problem-solving. Likewise, Maravé-Vivas et al. (2022) reported that sustained participation in community-based learning enhances participants' professional competence by encouraging adaptive thinking, collaborative leadership, and the practical application of disciplinary knowledge in diverse community settings. Furthermore, Leal Filho et al. (2023) emphasized that higher education institutions contribute more effectively to sustainable development when academic expertise is integrated with community participation through collaborative partnerships.

Experiencing Reciprocal Learning and Personal Fulfillment

Experiencing reciprocal learning and personal fulfillment emerged as a meaningful lived experience among faculty and staff involved in the implementation of community extension programs. Participants consistently described community engagement as a two-way learning process in which they not only shared their professional knowledge and skills but also gained valuable insights from the lived experiences, resilience, and indigenous knowledge of community members. Their narratives revealed that extension activities fostered greater empathy, cultural sensitivity, and professional reflection, enabling them to appreciate that meaningful community engagement is built upon mutual learning rather than one-directional service. Through these interactions, participants experienced a renewed sense of purpose, recognizing that their contributions positively influenced communities while simultaneously enriching their own personal and professional growth.

Faculty participants emphasized that engaging directly with community members broadened their perspectives as educators and strengthened their commitment to socially responsive teaching. They acknowledged that

community members also became valuable teachers who offered practical wisdom and real-life experiences that could not be acquired through formal instruction alone. One faculty participant shared: *"Every extension activity reminds me that learning is never one-sided. While we share our knowledge with the community, I also gain new perspectives from their experiences, resilience, and resourcefulness. These lessons inspire me to become a more responsive educator."* (F6) Similarly, another faculty member reflected: *"Working closely with community members has made me appreciate the realities they face every day. Their determination despite limited resources motivates me to continuously improve the way I teach and serve others."* (F1) These narratives demonstrate that faculty members experienced community engagement as a reciprocal learning process that transformed their understanding of education and public service. Their experiences suggest that professional expertise becomes more meaningful when integrated with the lived realities of community members, allowing educators to become more reflective, adaptive, and socially responsive practitioners.

Administrative staff likewise described community engagement as a personally fulfilling experience that strengthened their interpersonal relationships, enhanced their understanding of community needs, and deepened their commitment to institutional service. Through continuous interaction with beneficiaries, they recognized that extension activities provided opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives while witnessing the tangible impact of their collective efforts. One staff participant explained: *"Seeing the smiles and gratitude of the community after every activity reminds me that even the smallest contribution can make a meaningful difference in someone's life. That experience inspires me to continue serving with dedication."* (S3) Another staff member shared: *"Community extension has taught me to value empathy, patience, and respect. Working with different people helped me realize that genuine service begins with understanding their needs and treating everyone with compassion."* (S6) These accounts reveal that administrative staff also experienced reciprocal learning through authentic engagement with community members. Their narratives indicate that extension activities not only enhanced their organizational competencies but also nurtured personal values such as humility, compassion, and social responsibility.

The findings of this study are supported by Pinto and Costa-Ramvalho (2023) who found that participation in service-learning significantly enhanced students' social skills, prosocial behaviors, civic engagement, and personal development because learning occurred through authentic interaction with communities rather than traditional classroom instruction. Similarly, Aláez et al. (2022) reported that service-learning fosters reciprocal benefits for both learners and community members by promoting empathy, intergenerational understanding, social awareness, and collaborative learning. Likewise, Maravé-Vivas et al. (2022) demonstrated that sustained participation in service-learning significantly improves leadership, attitudes toward diversity, and commitment to social justice over time. Furthermore, Van Winkle et al. (2023) found that structured service-learning and critical reflection strengthen learners' appreciation of community service, teamwork, and professional responsibility.

Building Sustainable Community Partnerships

Building sustainable community partnerships emerged as the culminating lived experience shared by faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs. Participants consistently described that meaningful community engagement extends beyond conducting outreach activities or delivering institutional services. Instead, they emphasized that sustainable extension initiatives are founded on long-term relationships characterized by trust, collaboration, mutual respect, and shared commitment between the institution and its partner communities. Their narratives revealed that continuous engagement enabled them to cultivate strong partnerships that empowered community members to become active collaborators rather than passive recipients of services. Through these sustained relationships, participants recognized that community development is most effective when institutions and communities jointly identify priorities, share responsibilities, and pursue common goals.

Faculty participants emphasized that sustainable partnerships are established through continuous dialogue, mutual trust, and genuine collaboration with community stakeholders. They explained that long-term engagement allows both the institution and the community to understand each other's strengths, needs, and aspirations, thereby fostering more responsive and impactful extension initiatives. One faculty participant shared: *"Community extension is not simply about conducting activities. It is about building lasting relationships with people, listening*

to their concerns, and working together toward solutions that they truly need." (F7) Similarly, another faculty member reflected: *"The most rewarding part of extension is seeing community members become active partners rather than beneficiaries. When trust is established, collaboration becomes stronger, and every project becomes more meaningful."* (F4) These narratives illustrate that faculty members perceived sustainable community partnerships as relationships built on reciprocity rather than one-time service delivery. Participants recognized that meaningful extension programs require continuous engagement, shared decision-making, and respect for community knowledge. Their experiences demonstrate that trust develops gradually through consistent interaction, transparency, and the institution's commitment to addressing community concerns beyond individual extension activities. Consequently, faculty members viewed sustainable partnerships as essential for ensuring that extension programs remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to evolving community needs.

Administrative staff likewise underscored the importance of maintaining strong institutional-community relationships through effective communication, coordination, and consistent follow-up. Although their responsibilities differed from those of faculty members, they recognized that successful extension programs depended equally on maintaining productive partnerships with local stakeholders and ensuring that institutional commitments were fulfilled over time. One staff participant explained: *"Maintaining communication with our community partners is just as important as implementing the program itself. Regular coordination helps us understand their changing needs and strengthens our partnership over time."* (S2) Another staff member remarked: *"Every successful extension program is built on teamwork and trust. When communities know that our institution remains committed even after the activities are completed, they become more willing to participate in future programs."* (S5) These accounts demonstrate that administrative staff experienced partnership-building as a continuous relational process rather than a purely administrative responsibility. Their narratives highlight that effective communication, collaborative planning, and accountability are fundamental in strengthening institutional credibility and fostering long-term community participation.

The present findings are consistent with Kmack et al. (2023) who found that long-term campus–community partnerships are sustained through relationship-building, collaborative leadership, and shared action that enable institutions and community organizations to address local challenges collectively. Similarly, Leal Filho et al. (2023) reported that higher education institutions contribute more effectively to sustainable development when they establish collaborative partnerships that integrate institutional expertise with community participation. Likewise, Goodman et al. (2023) demonstrated that enduring community engagement depends on continuous communication, mutual respect, and relationship-centered practices that encourage active participation among institutional personnel and community partners. Their findings suggest that collaborative partnerships strengthen institutional relevance while empowering communities to become co-creators of sustainable development initiatives rather than passive beneficiaries. Furthermore, Turner and Piso (2024) emphasized that community–institution partnerships become sustainable when they are characterized by reciprocal benefits, collaborative governance, and continuous stakeholder engagement. These findings reinforce the present study by illustrating that meaningful partnerships emerge not from isolated service activities but from sustained collaboration built on mutual accountability and shared purpose.

Challenges Encountered by Faculty and Staff in the Implementation of Community Extension Programs

The implementation of community extension programs presents faculty and staff with various challenges that influence the planning, delivery, and sustainability of extension initiatives. While participants remained committed to fulfilling the institution's extension mandate, their experiences revealed that meaningful community engagement requires navigating institutional, operational, and contextual demands. Analysis of the participants' narratives generated three interconnected themes that describe the primary challenges they encountered: (1) Navigating Resource Constraints and Operational Limitations, (2) Bridging Differences in Community Contexts and Learner Adaptation, and (3) Balancing Academic Responsibilities and Community Engagement Commitments.

Navigating Resource Constraints and Operational Limitations

Navigating resource constraints and operational limitations emerged as a significant challenge experienced by faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs. While participants expressed strong

commitment to addressing community needs, they acknowledged that the effectiveness of extension initiatives was sometimes influenced by practical concerns related to funding availability, learning materials, transportation, manpower support, scheduling, and administrative processes. Their narratives revealed that community engagement is not solely dependent on the willingness of faculty and staff to serve but is also shaped by the institutional capacity to provide adequate resources and operational support. Participants emphasized that sustainable extension programs require careful planning, resource mobilization, and coordinated efforts among institutional units and community partners.

Faculty participants shared that resource limitations often required them to become flexible and innovative in implementing extension activities. They explained that although programs were carefully designed based on identified community needs, unexpected challenges involving limited materials, financial restrictions, and accessibility concerns required them to modify their approaches while ensuring that the intended outcomes were achieved. One faculty participant shared: *“There were instances when we had good plans for the community, but the available resources were not enough. We needed to adjust, maximize what we had, and find alternative ways to continue the activity.”* (F2) Another faculty member reflected: *“Extension work requires dedication, but we also need institutional support. The success of the program depends on the availability of resources, proper coordination, and the ability to respond to the actual situation in the community.”* (F5) These narratives demonstrate that faculty members experienced resource constraints as both challenges and opportunities for developing adaptability and creativity. Instead of viewing limitations as reasons for discontinuing extension activities, participants described how these situations encouraged them to become more resourceful and collaborative. Their experiences suggest that community engagement requires not only commitment but also the ability to negotiate practical realities while maintaining responsiveness to community needs.

Administrative staff participants similarly highlighted operational challenges associated with coordinating extension programs. They emphasized that successful implementation involves extensive preparation related to scheduling, transportation arrangements, procurement processes, documentation, communication with partners, and coordination among institutional offices. Although these responsibilities often occur behind the scenes, participants recognized that administrative support is essential in ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of extension initiatives. One administrative staff participant explained: *“A successful extension activity requires preparation beyond the actual implementation. We need to ensure that resources, documents, schedules, and coordination with partners are properly arranged before the activity begins.”* (S3) Another staff member stated: *“Maintaining extension programs requires teamwork. When resources are limited, coordination becomes more important because everyone needs to contribute to achieve the objectives of the program.”* (S6) These accounts reveal that administrative staff experienced community engagement as a collective institutional responsibility. Their narratives highlight that operational efficiency, communication, and resource management are fundamental in transforming extension plans into meaningful community interventions. The experiences of both faculty and staff demonstrate that challenges in resource availability do not only reflect limitations but also emphasize the importance of institutional commitment and collaborative problem-solving.

The findings are supported by Bushouse (2005), who examined resource constraints among community organizations involved in service-learning partnerships. The study revealed that limited organizational capacity, staff time, and available resources significantly influence the sustainability and effectiveness of community collaborations. Similarly, Tryon et al. (2008) identified several challenges in service-learning implementation, including limited time, project management concerns, scheduling difficulties, and the capacity of community organizations to support engagement activities. Their findings demonstrated that effective community engagement requires careful coordination between academic requirements and community realities. Furthermore, Moore and Ward (2010) highlighted that faculty engagement in community-based initiatives is influenced by institutional structures, workload considerations, and available organizational support. Moreover, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) emphasized that sustainable campus-community partnerships require intentional structures, shared responsibilities, and institutional commitment.

Bridging Differences in Community Contexts and Learner Adaptation

Bridging differences in community contexts and learner adaptation emerged as a significant challenge experienced by faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs. Participants described that

meaningful engagement required them to adjust their perspectives, communication approaches, and intervention strategies according to the unique circumstances of partner communities. Their narratives revealed that communities differ in terms of social realities, cultural practices, available resources, expectations, and existing capacities, requiring extension practitioners to move beyond standardized approaches and develop context-responsive programs.

Faculty participants emphasized that one of the challenges in community engagement was understanding the actual conditions of communities before designing and implementing interventions. They shared that their initial assumptions about community needs were often refined through direct interaction and consultation with community members. These experiences allowed them to recognize that effective extension programs should be grounded in community realities and developed through collaborative processes. One faculty participant shared: *"When we enter the community, we cannot immediately provide solutions based only on what we know. We need to listen first because the community understands their situation better than anyone else."* (F3) Another faculty member reflected: *"Each community has different needs and experiences. The challenge is adjusting our approach so that the programs become appropriate and meaningful to the people we serve."* (F6) These narratives illustrate that faculty members experienced community engagement as a process of continuous learning and adaptation. Participants recognized that communities possess valuable knowledge and experiences that must be considered when developing extension initiatives. Faculty members gradually embraced a partnership-oriented perspective where community members became active contributors in identifying concerns and determining appropriate responses.

Administrative staff participants similarly highlighted the importance of adapting institutional processes to different community contexts. They explained that variations in location, accessibility, stakeholder participation, and communication patterns influenced how extension activities were coordinated. They emphasized that successful implementation required flexibility, patience, and continuous communication with community partners. One administrative staff participant explained: *"Every community has its own situation. We need to adjust our coordination because the needs and circumstances of one community may be different from another."* (S4) Another staff member stated: *"Communication is very important because it allows us to understand what the community really needs and how we can provide appropriate assistance."* (S7) These accounts demonstrate that administrative staff viewed adaptation as an essential component of effective extension management. Their experiences revealed that community engagement involves navigating differences between institutional systems and community realities. Through continuous coordination, staff members contributed to creating more responsive and inclusive extension programs.

The findings support the work of Weerts and Sandmann (2010), who emphasized that institutions must understand community contexts and establish relationships that allow knowledge and resources to move across institutional and community boundaries. Similarly, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) argued that successful campus-community partnerships depend on reciprocal relationships, shared goals, and mutual understanding between institutions and communities. Furthermore, Preece (2013) highlighted that community engagement and service-learning initiatives often involve challenges related to negotiating community needs, institutional expectations, and collaborative processes. Adaptive leadership and partnership-building are essential in addressing differences between academic and community environments. Recent scholarship by Delaine et al. (2024) further emphasized that reciprocity is a central principle of community engagement. Their systematic review demonstrated that meaningful partnerships require recognition of different perspectives, shared decision-making, and deliberate efforts to balance institutional objectives with community priorities.

Balancing Academic Responsibilities and Community Engagement Commitments

Balancing academic responsibilities and community engagement commitments emerged as a significant challenge experienced by faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs. Participants described that while extension activities provided meaningful opportunities for professional growth and social contribution, managing these responsibilities alongside academic tasks, administrative duties, teaching obligations, and institutional requirements created considerable demands. Their narratives revealed that community engagement requires substantial time, preparation, coordination, and emotional investment, which must be carefully balanced with existing academic responsibilities.

Faculty participants emphasized that one of the major challenges in extension work was finding sufficient time to fulfill both instructional responsibilities and community commitments. They explained that extension activities often required preparation before implementation, actual engagement during community activities, and documentation and evaluation afterward. These additional responsibilities sometimes extended beyond their regular workload, requiring effective time management and personal commitment. One faculty participant shared: *“Balancing teaching responsibilities and extension activities can be challenging because both require time and preparation. We need to make sure that our responsibilities inside the institution are still fulfilled while responding to the needs of the community.”* (F2) Another faculty member reflected: *“Extension work does not end after the activity. There are preparations, coordination, monitoring, and reports that need to be completed. Managing everything requires dedication and proper scheduling.”* (F5) These narratives illustrate that faculty members experienced community engagement as a meaningful but demanding responsibility. Participants recognized that effective engagement requires institutional recognition of faculty workload, appropriate time allocation, and mechanisms that support the integration of teaching, research, and extension functions.

Administrative staff participants likewise highlighted challenges related to managing multiple responsibilities associated with extension coordination. They explained that extension programs require extensive administrative preparation, including communication with stakeholders, scheduling arrangements, documentation, monitoring of activities, and compliance with institutional requirements. These responsibilities often occur simultaneously with their regular office functions. One administrative staff participant explained: *“Sometimes the challenge is managing different tasks at the same time. Extension activities require immediate attention, but we also have regular responsibilities that need to be completed.”* (S3) Another staff member stated: *“Coordination requires time because we need to communicate with many people. Ensuring that everything is prepared while handling other duties can be difficult.”* (S6) These accounts demonstrate that administrative staff experienced community engagement as an additional responsibility requiring careful prioritization and coordination. Their experiences reveal that successful extension implementation depends not only on program design but also on the availability of human resources who can effectively manage operational demands.

The findings are supported by Abes et al. (2002), who emphasized that service-learning participation requires careful integration with academic structures because students and educators must negotiate competing academic and community expectations. Similarly, Brew (2003) argued that institutions must recognize engagement activities as legitimate academic contributions rather than additional tasks outside faculty responsibilities. Furthermore, Demb and Wade (2012) found that faculty engagement activities are often affected by workload pressures, competing institutional expectations, and limited time availability. Their research showed that faculty members require organizational support and recognition systems to sustain meaningful engagement activities. In addition, Chan, Ngai, and Kwan (2019) demonstrated that service-learning participation requires students to manage academic requirements alongside community commitments. Their findings revealed that structured support, reflection activities, and proper integration of service-learning into academic programs are important in helping participants manage competing demands.

Influence of Community Engagement in the Personal and Professional Development of Faculty and Staff

Community extension programs significantly influence the personal and professional development of faculty and staff by providing meaningful opportunities for experiential learning, leadership development, and reflective practice. Beyond delivering services to partner communities, participants described extension engagement as a transformative process that strengthened their professional competencies, deepened their commitment to public service, fostered personal growth, and reinforced their dedication to the institution's extension mission. Analysis of the participants' narratives generated four interconnected themes: (1) Strengthening Professional Competence and Leadership, (2) Enhancing Civic Responsibility and Social Consciousness, (3) Fostering Personal Growth and Reflective Practice, and (4) Advancing Institutional Commitment and Extension Excellence.

Strengthening Professional Competence and Leadership

Strengthening professional competence and leadership emerged as a significant influence of community extension programs on the professional development of faculty and staff. Participants described community extension engagement as an experiential platform that expanded their professional capabilities, strengthened their

leadership skills, and enhanced their ability to apply disciplinary expertise in addressing community concerns. Their narratives revealed that extension involvement moved beyond the delivery of institutional services and became a transformative professional experience where they developed competencies in communication, collaboration, decision-making, program management, and stakeholder engagement. Faculty participants emphasized that involvement in community extension programs improved their ability to connect professional knowledge with real community situations. They explained that working with diverse stakeholders challenged them to become more adaptive, reflective, and innovative in designing interventions.

One faculty participant shared: *“Extension activities helped me understand that professional competence is not only measured by what we know but also by how we use our knowledge to respond to the needs of people. It improved my communication, leadership, and ability to work with different stakeholders.”* (F1) Another faculty member reflected: *“Being involved in extension programs developed my leadership because I learned how to coordinate with others, manage activities, and make decisions based on the actual situation of the community.”* (F4) These narratives demonstrate that faculty members experienced community engagement as a context for professional learning and leadership development. Participants recognized that extension work provided opportunities to strengthen competencies that are difficult to acquire through classroom-based responsibilities alone. Through direct engagement with communities, they developed the ability to collaborate, negotiate, and implement responsive solutions.

Administrative staff participants similarly highlighted that extension involvement strengthened their organizational and leadership capacities. They explained that coordinating community programs required effective communication, teamwork, planning, and problem-solving. Their experiences showed that extension responsibilities contributed to their professional growth by allowing them to develop competencies beyond their regular administrative functions. One administrative staff participant explained: *“Extension activities improved my organizational skills because I needed to coordinate with different people and ensure that activities were properly implemented. It helped me become more confident in handling responsibilities.”* (S2) Another staff member stated: *“Through extension work, I learned how important teamwork and leadership are. Every successful activity requires cooperation, planning, and commitment from everyone involved.”* (S5) These accounts illustrate that administrative staff perceived extension participation as a valuable professional development experience. Their involvement strengthened their ability to manage institutional-community relationships and contributed to their growth as effective contributors to organizational goals.

The findings are supported by O’Meara (2016), who emphasized that engagement activities expand faculty roles by allowing them to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service in meaningful ways. Similarly, Kezar and Holcombe (2018) found that collaborative engagement experiences enhance professional capacity by developing leadership practices, collective responsibility, and organizational learning. Their study emphasized that meaningful institutional change occurs when individuals develop the capacity to collaborate and lead across different contexts. The scholarship of engagement broadens academic work by encouraging professionals to apply knowledge in addressing real-world problems. In addition, Bringle and Hatcher (2002) emphasized that effective campus-community partnerships require professionals who possess strong communication skills, collaborative abilities, and commitment to reciprocal relationships. Their work highlights that engagement experiences contribute to the development of professionals capable of working effectively with diverse stakeholders.

Enhancing Civic Responsibility and Social Consciousness

Enhancing civic responsibility and social consciousness emerged as a significant influence of community extension programs on the personal and professional development of faculty and staff. Participants described community engagement as an experience that deepened their awareness of social realities, strengthened their commitment to public service, and expanded their understanding of their roles as educators and institutional representatives. Their narratives revealed that extension involvement allowed them to move beyond professional responsibilities within the institution and recognize their broader responsibility in contributing to community empowerment and social transformation. Faculty participants emphasized that direct engagement with communities enabled them to better understand the challenges experienced by different sectors of society. Through interaction with community members, they developed greater empathy, social awareness, and

appreciation of the realities that influence people's lives. Participants explained that these experiences reshaped their perspectives on education and professional service by highlighting the importance of using their knowledge and skills to address community concerns.

One faculty participant shared: *"Extension activities opened my eyes to the realities experienced by communities. It reminded me that our role as educators is not only to teach inside the institution but also to contribute to improving the lives of people outside."* (F4) Another faculty member reflected: *"Working with communities helped me develop a stronger sense of responsibility. It made me realize that our expertise has greater value when it is shared and used to respond to social needs."* (F6) These narratives demonstrate that faculty members experienced community extension as a transformative process that strengthened their civic consciousness. Participants recognized that engagement with communities fostered a deeper understanding of social issues and encouraged them to become more active contributors to community development. Their experiences illustrate that extension programs serve as meaningful avenues for developing socially responsible professionals.

Administrative staff participants likewise highlighted that community engagement strengthened their appreciation of institutional responsibility toward society. They explained that participating in extension activities allowed them to witness community challenges firsthand and understand the importance of collective action in addressing social concerns. One administrative staff participant explained: *"When we participate in extension activities, we see the actual situation of the community. It reminds us that our institution has a responsibility to serve and create programs that can make a difference."* (S3) Another staff member stated: *"Extension work developed my awareness that every person in the institution has a role in helping communities. It is not only the responsibility of one office or group but a shared commitment."* (S4) These accounts reveal that administrative staff experienced extension involvement as an opportunity to strengthen their sense of social responsibility. Their participation encouraged them to view institutional service as a collective mission grounded in compassion, accountability, and commitment to community welfare.

The findings are supported by Celio et al. (2011), who highlight that meaningful engagement experiences strengthen individuals' awareness of community needs and encourage socially responsible behaviors. Similarly, Yorio and Ye (2012) demonstrated that service-learning enhances participants' social responsibility by connecting academic experiences with community realities. Their study found that engagement activities promote interpersonal development, social awareness, and a stronger commitment to civic participation. Furthermore, Conway et al. (2009) found that service-learning contributes to the development of civic attitudes by increasing awareness of social issues and encouraging individuals to participate actively in addressing community concerns. Their research emphasized that reflection and meaningful community interaction are essential in transforming service experiences into civic learning. In addition, Stewart and Wubbena (2015) emphasized that community engagement experiences promote social responsibility by encouraging participants to recognize their roles as contributors to societal well-being. Their study highlighted that engagement-based learning strengthens empathy, cultural understanding, and commitment to serving diverse communities.

Fostering Personal Growth and Reflective Practice

Fostering personal growth and reflective practice emerged as a significant influence of community extension programs on the personal development of faculty and staff. Participants described their involvement in community engagement as a transformative experience that shaped their values, perspectives, and understanding of their roles as professionals and members of society. Their narratives revealed that working directly with communities encouraged self-reflection, humility, empathy, adaptability, and a deeper appreciation of the lived experiences of others. Through continuous engagement with community partners, participants recognized that extension activities were not only opportunities to help but also meaningful experiences that contributed to their own personal transformation. Faculty participants emphasized that community extension activities allowed them to develop greater empathy and awareness of the realities experienced by different communities. They shared that direct interaction with community members challenged their previous assumptions and encouraged them to become more reflective practitioners. These experiences enabled them to appreciate the importance of listening, understanding, and responding to community needs with compassion and respect.

One faculty participant shared: *"Extension activities changed the way I look at communities. Before, I thought our role was mainly to provide assistance, but I realized that we also learn from the people we serve. Their*

experiences teach us humility and compassion.” (F2) Another faculty member reflected: “Through community engagement, I became more reflective about my purpose as an educator. It reminded me that our work is not only about professional responsibilities but also about making a positive difference in people’s lives.” (F5) These narratives illustrate that faculty members experienced community extension as a process of personal transformation. Participants recognized that engagement with communities developed qualities beyond technical competence, including patience, empathy, resilience, and appreciation of diverse perspectives. Their experiences demonstrate that extension programs create reflective spaces where professionals examine their values and strengthen their commitment to socially meaningful work.

Administrative staff participants similarly described how community involvement contributed to their personal development. They explained that exposure to different community situations increased their appreciation of service, strengthened their interpersonal relationships, and encouraged them to become more compassionate and committed institutional members. One administrative staff participant explained: *“Meeting community members and seeing their experiences made me appreciate the importance of helping others. It changed my perspective and encouraged me to become more involved in-service activities.” (S2) Another staff member stated: “Extension work taught me patience and understanding because every community has different situations. I learned to be more flexible and considerate when working with others.” (S6) These accounts demonstrate that administrative staff experienced community engagement as a meaningful personal learning journey. Their participation helped them develop greater awareness of social realities and strengthened their commitment to contribute positively to institutional and community initiatives. From a phenomenological perspective, the essence of this theme lies in participants’ realization that community extension programs become transformative when experiences are accompanied by reflection.*

The findings of the present study demonstrate that community extension programs serve as transformative experiences that foster personal growth, self-awareness, empathy, and reflective practice among faculty and staff. Participants’ narratives revealed that sustained engagement with communities allowed them to reconsider their professional roles, develop deeper appreciation of social realities, and strengthen their commitment to meaningful service. This finding is supported by Salam et al. (2019), who emphasized that service-learning provides multidimensional benefits for participants, including personal development, social awareness, and improved understanding of community realities. Similarly, Kawai (2021) proposed that reflection is a critical mechanism through which service-learning experiences become transformative. The author explained that reflective processes allow participants to connect their community experiences with identity development, enabling them to develop deeper awareness of their values, responsibilities, and roles in society. This supports the present finding that faculty and staff did not merely participate in extension activities but internalized these experiences as opportunities for personal transformation. Furthermore, Blanco Cano and García-Martín (2021) reported that service-learning positively influences psychosocial outcomes, including empathy, civic attitudes, critical thinking, teamwork, and self-concept. In addition, Abedini et al. (2012) found that community-based service experiences influence participants’ understanding of social contexts and promote personal reflection.

Advancing Institutional Commitment and Extension Excellence

Advancing institutional commitment and extension excellence emerged as a significant influence of community extension programs on the professional development and institutional orientation of faculty and staff. Participants described extension engagement as a mechanism that strengthened their attachment to institutional values, reinforced collective responsibility, and encouraged continuous improvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of community-based initiatives. Their narratives revealed that extension participation allowed them to recognize community engagement not merely as an institutional requirement but as a core expression of the institution’s mission, social responsibility, and commitment to sustainable development.

Faculty participants emphasized that involvement in extension programs strengthened their understanding of the institution’s broader social role. They explained that engagement activities encouraged them to align their professional practices with institutional goals by developing programs that were relevant, responsive, and sustainable. Through their experiences, they realized that extension excellence requires continuous innovation, collaboration, and commitment to improving community outcomes. One faculty participant shared: *“Extension activities strengthened my commitment to our institution because they showed me that our mission extends beyond*

the classroom. We have a responsibility to create programs that respond to community needs and create lasting impact.” (F3) Another faculty member reflected: *“Being part of extension programs encouraged me to improve our practices. We need to evaluate what works, strengthen partnerships, and ensure that our projects provide meaningful benefits to the community.”* (F7) These narratives demonstrate that faculty members viewed extension engagement as an important component of institutional excellence. Participants recognized that quality extension programs require strategic planning, continuous evaluation, collaboration, and shared ownership among institutional members. Their experiences illustrate that engagement initiatives contribute to building an institutional culture centered on service, accountability, and social responsiveness.

Administrative staff participants similarly highlighted that extension programs strengthened their commitment to institutional effectiveness. They explained that supporting extension activities required coordination, accountability, documentation, and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. Through these responsibilities, they developed a deeper appreciation of how their roles contributed to institutional-community partnerships. One administrative staff participant explained: *“Extension programs taught me that every person in the institution has an important role. Good coordination and commitment are necessary to make sure that programs are implemented successfully.”* (S4) Another staff member stated: *“Seeing the outcomes of extension activities motivates us to improve our processes and provide stronger support for future programs.”* (S8) These accounts reveal that administrative staff experienced extension involvement as a pathway toward professional accountability and institutional improvement. Their experiences demonstrate that extension excellence is achieved through collective participation, effective systems, and shared commitment among institutional stakeholders.

The findings are supported by Furco (2010), who emphasized that institutionalizing community engagement requires alignment between institutional mission, organizational structures, leadership commitment, and evaluation systems. Furco argued that engagement becomes sustainable when institutions embed it within their policies and practices rather than treating it as an isolated activity. Similarly, Sandmann et al. (2009) highlighted that institutional commitment to engagement develops through organizational transformation, leadership support, and the recognition of community engagement as a legitimate academic function. Their study emphasized that sustainable engagement requires institutional cultures that value collaboration and public responsibility. Furthermore, O’Meara et al. (2011) found that faculty engagement is strengthened when institutions provide recognition, resources, and organizational support. Their research demonstrated that institutional structures significantly influence whether community engagement becomes a sustained professional practice among faculty members. In addition, Holland (2005) emphasized that institutions achieve meaningful engagement when they develop systematic approaches for assessing and improving their community involvement. His work highlighted that extension excellence requires continuous reflection, accountability, and alignment between institutional values and community priorities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the lived experiences of faculty and staff in implementing community extension programs were transformative, meaningful, and grounded in service, collaboration, professional growth, and social responsibility. Community extension work enabled participants to apply their expertise to real community needs, develop leadership and organizational competencies, experience reciprocal learning, and build meaningful relationships with community stakeholders. More importantly, their experiences revealed that effective extension work is not merely the delivery of services but a continuing process of partnership, shared learning, and collective action. The findings further demonstrate that sustainable community engagement requires institutional commitment, adequate resources, effective coordination, continuous evaluation, and long-term collaboration with communities. In view of these findings, higher education institutions are recommended to strengthen institutional support for community extension through adequate funding, resources, and logistical assistance. Faculty and staff development programs should also be provided to enhance competencies in community needs assessment, project management, partnership-building, monitoring, and evaluation. Institutions are further encouraged to recognize community extension engagement in workload allocation, performance evaluation, and professional development. Finally, sustained mechanisms for community consultation, feedback, monitoring, and partnership renewal should be established to ensure that extension programs remain relevant, responsive, participatory, and sustainable.

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