



Community Services, Mentoring, and Student Motivation at The University Level: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Mediating Role of Mentoring

Maliha Kanwal¹, Dr. Sidra Kiran²

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Alhamd Islamic University, Islamabad.

Email: malihakhanewal@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Alhamd Islamic University, Islamabad.

Email: Sidra.kiran@aiu.edu.pk

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Corresponding author:

Maliha Kanwal

Email:

malihakhanewal@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Community services by students in the contemporary higher learning institutions is a very crucial aspect in the development of a well-balanced individual. This research examined the relationship between community services and motivation of university students, especially focusing on the mediating effect of mentoring in six public sector universities of upper, lower, and central Punjab regions of Pakistan. Quantitative phase of study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to collect data from 900 students across six universities of Punjab, Pakistan using a seven-point Likert questionnaire measuring community service, academic motivation, and mentoring and investigated through descriptive statistics and PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation) Modelling. In the qualitative phase, data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with 15 students and analyzed thematically. Results indicated positive attitudes toward community service but low participation, moderate overall motivation, and high perceived mentoring quality. Service-learning emerged as the strongest predictor, and mentoring significantly mediated the impact of community service on career, altruistic, and self-exploratory motivations. Regional variations were also noted. The results confirm that mentoring functions as a genuine but selective mediating path but it shaped and influenced by regional variations and cultural environments. These results make a strong contribution to the educational policy and practice in terms of providing them with strategies of encouraging motivation and participation among students driven by the increased mentoring and community involvement.

Introduction

Instead of typical classroom instruction, education is seen as a transforming social effort. In today's higher education systems, universities are increasingly expected to nurture not only academic competence but also civic responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and the interpersonal growth of their students. Student motivation is important to both academic success and personal growth, and motivated students perform better academically, are more persistent, and acquire concepts more deeply (Guay et al., 2010). Despite this, motivational deficiencies among university students continue to be a persistent concern, especially in developing-country contexts where socioeconomic pressures and institutional resource constraints combine to suppress students' intrinsic motivation (Malik et al., 2022; Iqbal & Modood, 2023).

Various studies had examined a direct relationship between student motivation and community service but the potential mediating role of mentoring as a psychological and relational bridge between community service and student's motivational outcomes has received very limited systematic attention. Student motivation, academic self-esteem, goal orientation, and resilience can be significantly enhanced by the mentoring of an experienced person who provides support, guidance, as well as encouragement to a less experienced student (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Eby et al., 2013). Community service has been theoretically and

empirically related to a number of motivational outcomes, yet the mechanisms that transmit its effects remain unclear. In Pakistani public universities, formal mentorship programs and community service projects are either missing or inadequately institutionalized. This study quantitatively and qualitatively investigates the three-way relationship between community service, mentoring, and student motivation in Punjab, Pakistan.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to study the relationship between community service participation and student motivation at the university level quantitatively & qualitatively, and to determine the extent to which mentoring mediates this relationship.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the current levels of student motivation, community service engagement, mentoring provision in Punjab's public-sector universities will be tested using structural equation modeling, as well as the direct effects of these variables and the indirect (mediated) pathways by which community service shapes different characteristics of student motivation.

Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between student motivation and community service and mentoring, which has received little systematic attention in the South Asian context. Theoretically, this research advances knowledge of mentoring as a mediation mechanism by placing it within Self-Determination Theory and Social Cognitive Theory. Practically, the results can help university administrations and the HEC of Pakistan to develop service-learning programs that incorporate successful mentoring elements, improving student involvement, retention, and civic responsibility. The study provides specific recommendations for institutional policy and practice in Pakistani higher education by determining which motivational dimensions mentoring most strongly influences.

Objectives of the Study

The quantitative objectives of this study were:

- To measure motivation level of university students enrolled in selected universities across Punjab province, Pakistan.
- To determine how community services are currently being provided at the universities being studied.
- To analyse the mentorship programs provided to students at universities that were sampled.
- To evaluate the association between community service involvement and student motivation.
- To determine the relationship among community service and student motivation using the mentoring programs as mediating variable.

Literature Review

Both academic achievement and personal growth depend heavily on student motivation.

Self-Determination Theory states that when three elementary psychological needs including autonomy, competence, and relatedness are achieved, intrinsic motivation flourishes. Students whose psychological needs are satisfied have improved mental health, greater determination, and deeper conceptual learning. Intrinsic motivation is a good predictor of long-term learning and wellbeing than externally planned motivation (Guay et al., 2010). However, in higher education, a combination of extrinsic factors like career prospects, social pressure and social enjoyment as well as intrinsic factors like self-exploration and altruism have their roles in shaping motivational profiles.

A variety of motivational outcomes have been linked to community service, which is generally defined as voluntary involvement with community needs rather than traditional coursework. Based on Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, researchers argue that community service increases students' motivation by strengthening their civic identity, self-efficacy, and social relatedness. According to empirical studies, Participation in service-learning is positively correlated with improvements in academic motivation, commitment to societal goals and self-confidence (Eby et al., 2013). Because it combines academic content with significant real-world contribution, such participation yields the strongest motivational gains. Mentoring is a growing and progressive relationship in which a more qualified and experienced mentor/ person offers support, direction, and encouragement. Student motivation, self-

esteem, and perseverance have all been independently connected to mentoring (Jacobi, 1991; Eby et al., 2013; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Career and psychosocial mentoring roles are distinguished in Kram's (1988) model.

Theoretically, mentoring is very more inspiring and meaningful for those students who encounter difficult and unfamiliar challenges during volunteering community services. A good mentor helped them understand these challenges, offered emotional support, reflective dialogue. This guidance turns a tough experience into a powerful lesson that keeps the student motivated for a long time.

Despite this theoretical acceptability, studies examining mentoring as a formal mediator between community service and motivation are rare, and virtually absent in the Pakistani higher education context, where mentoring is also shaped by indigenous traditions of guidance and service.

Following hypotheses were proposed on the basis of this literature:

- **H1:** Community service involvement and student motivation are positively and statistically significantly correlated at the university level, and this relationship is mediated by mentorship experiences.
- **H2:** The association between community service engagement and student motivation is significantly mediated by mentoring.
- **H3:** The beneficial effect of community service participation on student motivation is strengthened when students have access to a mentor and weakened in its absence.

Methodology

The pragmatist paradigm and an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design were used in this study. The quantitative phase was carried out first and the qualitative phase came after to elaborate and explain the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The target population comprised students enrolled in the Education and Social Sciences departments of public-sector universities in Punjab province, conceptually divided into three regions: Upper, Central, and Lower Punjab. A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was used. Punjab was first stratified into three regions; two public-sector universities were randomly selected from each region, yielding six universities; four faculties were randomly selected per university; one department was conveniently selected per faculty; and first-year and final-year classes were purposively chosen. The final sample comprised 900 students, with 300 from each region and 150 from each university.

A structured self-report questionnaire, comprising a demographic section, the Community Service Participation Scale, the Academic Motivation Scale, and the Mentoring Process Scale, was developed for collection of data. All scale items used a seven-point Likert format (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree), and negatively worded items were reverse-coded prior to analysis. The instruments were adapted from established scales with demonstrated reliability and validity.

There were two stages for the analysis of quantitative data. The sample was described using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis) and described the levels of community service, motivation, and mentoring, with means interpreted against the seven-point midpoint using the bands Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–4.66), and High (4.67–7.00). Measurement and structural models were evaluated by using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), including direct effects, the mediating role of mentoring (tested through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples), and the moderating role of region through multi-group analysis. For the qualitative phase, 15 students were purposively selected to capture variation across region, degree level, gender, and community service experience, and were interviewed using a semi-structured guide developed from the quantitative findings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method was used to analyze the interview data thematically, and emergent themes were mapped back to the quantitative findings they explained.

Results and Discussion

The sample comprised 477 female (53.0%) and 423 male (47.0%) students, most enrolled at the BS level (71.4%), with 58.8% aged 21–30 years. Attitudes toward community service were High ($M = 5.00$), yet 52.3% of respondents reported no prior community service experience and only 4.2% participated weekly, revealing a clear attitude–behaviour gap. Overall student motivation was Moderate ($M = 4.56$), with Self-Exploration ($M = 5.32$) and Career and Qualifications ($M = 5.31$) the strongest drivers and Rejection of Alternative Options ($M = 3.70$) and Social Pressure ($M = 3.79$) the weakest. Overall perceived mentoring was High ($M = 4.75$), with all five sub-dimensions rated High; Emotional Support ($M = 4.84$) was the most strongly perceived function and Advocacy (M

= 4.67) the least. Regionally, Upper Punjab recorded the richest community service and mentoring environments, whereas Lower Punjab reported the highest motivation (M = 4.79) despite the lowest mentorship (M = 4.57).

Measurement Model

The measurement model and the structural relationships, such as the direct effects, the mediating role of mentoring, and the moderating role of region through multi-group analysis (MGA), were assessed using PLS-SEM (Partial least squares structural equation modeling). The study frame work is described in Figure 1.

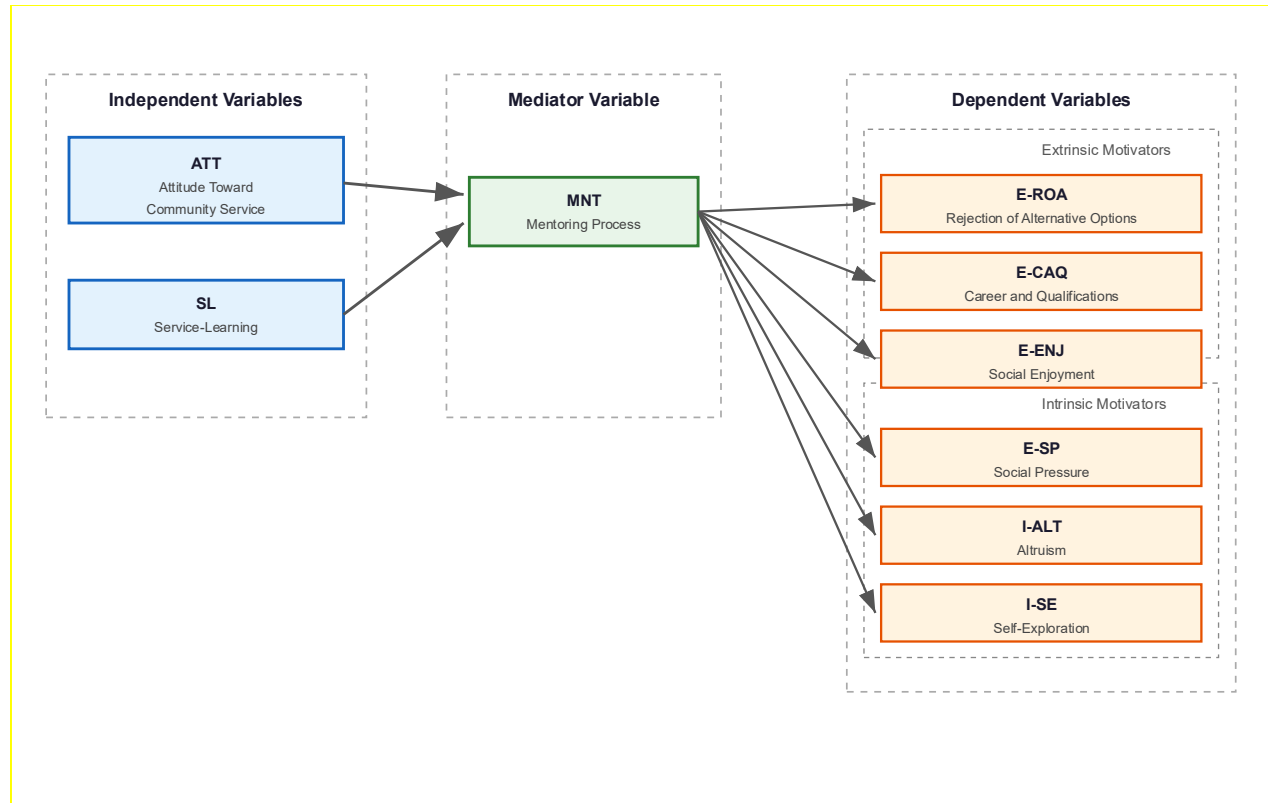


Figure 1: Study Framework

The measurement model confirmed a satisfactory reliability and validity. Good indicator reliability was indicated by all outer loadings exceeding the suggested value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Strong construct reliability was demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.884 to 0.981 and composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) exceeding 0.90 for all construct. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) verified convergent validity, with all values ranging from 0.642 to 0.805, above the 0.50 minimum (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 presents the construct reliability and validity statistics.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite (rho_a)	reliability	Composite (rho_c)	reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ATT	0.970	0.970		0.972		0.674
E-CAQ	0.939	0.940		0.954		0.805
E-ENJ	0.937	0.943		0.952		0.799
E-ROA	0.884	0.900		0.915		0.683
E-SP	0.915	0.958		0.934		0.738
I-ALT	0.934	0.935		0.950		0.792
I-SE	0.933	0.934		0.949		0.790
MNT	0.981	0.983		0.982		0.642
SL	0.933	0.934		0.947		0.750

Two complementary methods were used to access discriminant validity: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. According to the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al. (2015), all HTMT values should be below 0.85 in order to show that discriminant validity is established. In this study, Construct Pairs like Social Enjoyment (E-ENJ) and Attitudes Toward Community Service (ATT); Social Pressure (E-SP) and Attitudes Toward Community Service (ATT); Rejection of Alternative Options (E-ROA) and Attitudes Toward Community Service (ATT) had HTMT values as 0.059, 0.048, 0.068 respectively, which are far below 0.85 and ensuring good discriminant validity of these pairs. While Self-Exploration (I-SE) and Altruism (I-ALT) has HTMT value as 0.880 marginally exceeds the conservative cutoff but is still lower than the more liberal threshold of 0.90 recommended by Gold et al. (2001), for two such very-similar intrinsic factors it would be reasonable to infer an acceptable, although on-borderline, discriminant validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied because, as Table 2 shows, the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its inter-construct correlations. All of the collinearity (VIF) values were significantly below the 5.0 cutoff, indicating that multicollinearity was not present.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Constructs	ATT	E-CAQ	E-ENJ	E-ROA	E-SP	I-ALT	I-SE	MNT	SL
ATT	0.821								
E-CAQ	0.685	0.897							
E-ENJ	0.033	0.274	0.894						
E-ROA	0.010	0.264	0.727	0.826					
E-SP	-0.014	0.203	0.717	0.711	0.859				
I-ALT	0.631	0.750	0.267	0.184	0.240	0.890			
I-SE	0.665	0.794	0.237	0.154	0.161	0.822	0.889		
MNT	0.611	0.656	0.123	0.011	0.088	0.693	0.712	0.801	
SL	0.767	0.755	0.167	0.141	0.116	0.721	0.744	0.653	0.6

Structural Model, Mediation, and Moderation

All six motivational constructs and the mentoring process were significantly predicted by Service-Learning (SL), which was found to be the most consistently influential predictor ($\beta = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$). The Mentoring Process, Career and Qualifications, Self-Exploration, and Altruism were all positively correlated with Attitudes toward Community Service (ATT), whereas Social Enjoyment ($\beta = -0.250$), Social Pressure ($\beta = -0.270$), and Rejection of Alternative Options ($\beta = -0.212$) were negatively correlated. These results suggested that students who have more positive attitudes toward community service are less likely to be driven by rejection of alternative options, social pressure, or social enjoyment. The direct effects are mentioned in Table 3.

Table 3. Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Relationship	Original (O)	sample (M)	mean	Standard (STDEV)	deviation	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
ATT -> E-CAQ	0.191	0.192		0.039		4.848	0.000
ATT -> E-ENJ	-0.250	-0.252		0.050		4.955	0.000
ATT -> E-ROA	-0.212	-0.214		0.053		4.031	0.000
ATT -> E-SP	-0.270	-0.274		0.048		5.569	0.000
ATT -> I-ALT	0.089	0.089		0.038		2.313	0.021
ATT -> I-SE	0.128	0.129		0.039		3.296	0.001
ATT -> MNT	0.268	0.270		0.050		5.393	0.000
MNT -> E-CAQ	0.248	0.248		0.041		6.038	0.000
MNT -> E-ENJ	0.072	0.072		0.052		1.389	0.165
MNT -> E-ROA	-0.101	-0.102		0.053		1.884	0.060
MNT -> E-SP	0.074	0.074		0.054		1.361	0.173
MNT -> I-ALT	0.371	0.370		0.042		8.742	0.000
MNT -> I-SE	0.369	0.370		0.038		9.713	0.000
SL -> E-CAQ	0.446	0.446		0.046		9.742	0.000
SL -> E-ENJ	0.311	0.313		0.058		5.360	0.000
SL -> E-ROA	0.369	0.374		0.059		6.210	0.000

SL -> E-SP	0.274	0.278	0.056	4.866	0.000
SL -> I-ALT	0.411	0.411	0.046	8.907	0.000
SL -> I-SE	0.405	0.404	0.044	9.241	0.000
SL -> MNT	0.447	0.445	0.052	8.585	0.000

In mediation analysis, Mentoring was found to significantly mediate the impact of community service on three specific motivations: career development, altruism, and self-exploration. Whereas the indirect pathways through social enjoyment, social pressure, and rejection of alternative options were not statistically significant. This suggests that mentoring serves as a selective mediating mechanism, transferring the impact of community service to career-oriented and intrinsic motivations instead of social or pressure-based ones. The mediation effects are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation Effects

Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
SL -> MNT -> E-CAQ	0.111	0.110	0.022	5.107	0.000
SL -> MNT -> E-ENJ	0.032	0.031	0.023	1.398	0.162
SL -> MNT -> E-ROA	-0.045	-0.046	0.025	1.819	0.069
SL -> MNT -> E-SP	0.033	0.033	0.024	1.367	0.172
SL -> MNT -> I-ALT	0.166	0.164	0.025	6.632	0.000
SL -> MNT -> I-SE	0.165	0.164	0.025	6.672	0.000
ATT -> MNT -> E-CAQ	0.067	0.067	0.017	3.889	0.000
ATT -> MNT -> E-ENJ	0.019	0.020	0.015	1.272	0.204
ATT -> MNT -> E-ROA	-0.027	-0.028	0.015	1.764	0.078
ATT -> MNT -> E-SP	0.020	0.020	0.016	1.238	0.216
ATT -> MNT -> I-ALT	0.099	0.100	0.023	4.348	0.000
ATT -> MNT -> I-SE	0.099	0.100	0.021	4.623	0.000

The model's overall generalizability within Punjab was confirmed by multi-group analysis, which revealed that the majority of structural paths were invariant across regions. However, there were significant differences between Lower and Upper Punjab in the paths ATT→Social Enjoyment, ATT→Social Pressure, ATT→Mentoring, and Mentoring→Social Enjoyment. This suggests that the way civic attitudes and the mentoring process translate into specific motivational orientations is moderated by regional context. These variations most likely reflect institutional, sociocultural, and economic differences throughout the province. When considered collectively, the quantitative results verify that community service and service-learning are important antecedents that have both direct and indirect effects on the mentoring process and student motivation, working through the extrinsic motivators of career and credentials and the intrinsic motivators of self-discovery and altruism. The study's three hypotheses were validated: H1 was accepted (with the qualification that the relationship did not hold uniformly across all motivational sub-dimensions), H2 was partially accepted due to the selective mediation, and H3 was conditionally accepted because mentoring enhanced intrinsic and career motivations and its effects varied by region.

Qualitative Findings

Table 5 summarizes the five themes that developed from the thematic analysis of the 15 interviews. Theme 1 (the attitude-action gap) revealed that rather than having poor civic attitudes, students attributed low participation to time constraints, workload, and resource limitations. The way that experiential, confidence-boosting exposure combined competence with emotional reward was encapsulated in Theme 2 (service-learning as transformative exposure). The Theme 3, (mentoring as an academic and career anchor) showed that mentors, mostly instructors and faculty, had a greater influence on career path than the social aspects of college life. The Theme 4 (purpose-versus externally-driven students) depicted civically conscious students creating a purpose identity that set them apart from socially or externally motivated goals. In areas where formal mentoring was less prevalent, Theme 5 (collective and cultural sources of motivation) emphasized family, community, social media, and religious values as key sources of inspiration when mentoring was not available.

Table 5. Thematic Framework from Interview Data

1. The attitude-action gap	Time/workload; lack of resources; lack of awareness; low interest	10-14	High CS attitudes but low participation
2. Service-learning as transformative exposure	Confidence; practical learning	5-8	Service-learning as strongest predictor
3. Mentoring as academic-career anchor	Teacher/faculty mentors; career shaping; selective social role	9-14	Mentoring mediates career & self-exploration
4. Purpose vs. external drivers	Passion/service orientation; disengaged external-driven peers	13	Negative attitude-social-motivation link
5. Collective sources of motivation	Family; teachers/mentors; media; religious values	9-10	Regional variation in motivation

Mixed-Methods Integration

Consistent with the explanatory sequential design, the five qualitative themes were mapped onto the corresponding quantitative results and classified as explaining, confirming, or qualifying the statistical findings, as shown in Table 6. Four linkages were explanatory: the qualitative data explained why positive attitudes toward community service coincide with low participation (time, workload, and resource barriers rather than weak conviction), and why mentoring mediates only certain motivations (mentors were experienced predominantly as academic and career anchors rather than social-relational ones, which explains why mentoring transmitted community service effects to career, altruism, and self-exploration motivations but not to socially driven ones). Two linkages were confirmatory, triangulating the potency of service-learning and the regional variability of mentoring. One linkage was qualifying: the finding that Lower Punjab reported the highest motivation despite the lowest mentorship is not predicted by the mediation logic alone, and the qualitative accounts suggested that, where formal mentoring is weaker, familial and communal support structures substitute for the motivational function that mentoring performs elsewhere. This refines the model's institution-centred interpretation and underscores the embeddedness of student motivation in its socio-cultural context.

Table 6. Integration of Quantitative Findings and Qualitative Themes

High CS attitudes (M = 5.00) but low participation (52.3% none)	Theme 1: Attitude-action gap	Explains	Time, workload, and resource barriers - not weak attitudes - suppress participation
SL strongest predictor of all outcomes and MNT (b = 0.447)	Theme 2: Service-learning as transformative exposure	Confirms	& Experiential, confidence-building exposure fuses competence with meaning
MNT mediates SL/ATT -> career, altruism, self-exploration only	Theme 3: Mentoring as academic-career anchor	Explains	Mentors act mainly as career/competence anchors, not social-relational ones
ATT negatively predicts social enjoyment, social pressure, ROA	Theme 4: Purpose- vs. externally-driven students	Explains	Civically-minded students build a purpose identity that rejects external motives
Lower Punjab: highest motivation despite lowest mentorship	Theme 5: Collective & cultural motivation sources	Explains (partly contradicts)	Family, community, and cultural values substitute for formal mentoring
MGA: MNT -> social enjoyment significant in LP, not UP	Theme 5 / Theme 3 (regional variation)	Confirms	Region shapes whether mentoring operates through social vs. academic channels

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study confirms that community service, mentoring, and motivation are meaningfully interrelated among university students in Punjab, and that mentoring serves as a genuine but selective mediating mechanism shaped by cultural context. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrated that the qualitative themes not only echoed the statistical results but explained their mechanisms and, in one respect, refined the theoretical account by revealing family and community as substitute motivational sources where formal mentoring is weak. Service-learning was the single most influential determinant of both motivation and the mentoring process. Universities should expand structured service-learning opportunities, broaden mentoring beyond its academic-career focus, and adopt region-sensitive strategies. By explaining the attitude-behaviour gap, tracing the power of service-learning, and revealing the embeddedness of motivation in family and community, the study

contributes both to the mediation literature in an under-researched context and to the practical strengthening of student motivation and community engagement in Pakistani higher education.

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