

Community College—A means to Meet the Needs of the Excluded in Higher Education

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Abstract

At the end of the twentieth century a number of community colleges were established in Tamil Nadu to reduce the mismatch between education and employment. Roughly a decade has passed by since establishment of such colleges in Tamil Nadu and therefore, it is the right time to evaluate the functioning of such colleges in achieving the expected goal. The present paper is one such modest attempt made on community colleges to evaluate in terms of number of colleges started and their governance, their location, courses offered, students' enrolment pattern in various courses and their pass-outs from 1998 – 2005. To facilitate the evaluation, an empirical study was conducted by making personal visits to some selected community colleges to understand the students' perception towards such colleges and the findings are discussed in the paper.

Introduction

Education is the manifestation of knowledge already in man. It is also a continuous process of perfecting the inherited as well as learnt knowledge skills to serve the society. It could be much better and useful when provided at a right stage. The number of schools, colleges, and universities have increased manifold. However, the right type of education is not being imparted to the young learners. A large number of students coming out of these institutions being unable to find suitable employment moreover, not being fully equipped to face life and its challenges. As a

consequence, unemployment is persisting in all the developing countries and is increasing over the years. It is necessary to ask the question, for whom these educational institutions, if they do not prepare young men and women for life in the real world. Indeed, education which is provided both through the formal as well as non-formal education centres has not created confidence in the student community. On the other hand they have made them depend upon the outside agencies. We need education which is not only competitive, but also seen to be fair, and closely linked to employment opportunities. Combating

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the two may be able to satisfy better requirements of both ability and aspiration of the school leaving students. Therefore, it is felt need to respond the deficiencies of the vocational education system through proper industry-institutional linkage, competence assessment, and on-the-job training on the basis of local needs. Hence, community college can be an alternative system of education to liberate and empower such desperated groups of society and to include the excluded in employment opportunities by imparting the needed skills for their livelihood.

Community College: An Educational Alternative

The concept of community college is an innovative and recent phenomenon. Philosophically, community college is one that accepted the responsibility for providing both transfer to higher education regardless of financial resources and also prepare for some occupation. It is an institution which satisfies the demands of the community both for post-higher secondary education and for middle-level manpower of the nation. It is expected that community college would accommodate all applicants; over-achievers as well under-achievers. In other words, it is an educational institution of the people by the people and for the people. Community college is a twentieth century phenomenon, generated by three principal forces. First is the growing trend to reject the elitist view of higher education. Next is the tendency of government and of industry to view higher education as a only source of

trained manpower and finally, there is the need created the technological explosion to supply theoretical scientists with a support structure, comprised of technicians.

Community college is an American concept, but is not new one to Indian education because it was already recommended by Sampurnananda Committee on Emotional Integration, way back in 1962 to provide skills and work-oriented education to meet the needs of the students who have finished school. The original concept of community college modified and adopted according to Indian situation. However, it has been started in India only in 1995. Community college system specifically focuses on the education for livelihood. It is expected to promote job-oriented, work-related, skills-based, and life-coping education to the unreached section of the society. Access is the keyword to the community college. They are cost-effective, offering low cost, quality programmes to specific needs of a variety of clients. Therefore, it attracts the poor of both rural and urban, and women.

Need for the Study

The traditional colleges and universities are elitist in their approach to higher education, and aimed at preparing students for degrees. Students passing out from such educational institutions are expected to fill up leadership positions in the society and the economy. All such institutions paid scant attention to the educational and training needs of the growing number of persons entering middle level positions where competence

rather than degrees matter. In this way the traditional colleges are unable to satisfy the educational needs of the contemporary society and aspirations of the people. Hence, community college would be a major instrument for fulfilling this gap and would be an alternative arrangement in higher education to satisfy the educational-occupational needs of the community.

The idea of community college is considered to be an important part of restructuring Indian education. It has been gained the international significance already, for dealing with large numbers and training of middle-level manpower for the economic and social needs of a nation and now in our country. It is a new social invention to intervene structurally, between the school and the university though it being a part of the higher education and not of the school. In India, community college is intended to serve the students of the adolescent age-group, but it is flexible to everyone in the community from the community of the very aged. Courses of study and duration are formulated in relation to the demands of the community and national needs of educational vocational choices for consistent of individual aptitudes and manpower requirements at different levels.

During the end of the twentieth century private initiatives have been taken to establish institutions based on the American community college model in India. These institutions come up because of the vision and commitment to make the difference and create an educational alternative in the country and therefore, many community colleges were started, particularly in Tamil Nadu

and spread over in the entire State. However, the concentration of community colleges is found to be more in southern districts of Tamil Nadu. It is the right time to recognise that the community college has an identity of its own though it is a part of the totality of education. It occupies a strategic position and had productive relationship with higher secondary schools and college and university system. Hence, an attempt has been made to conduct an evaluation on these colleges; therefore, the present article is an outcome of a detailed study on some selected community colleges of southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives of the Study

The present evaluation on community colleges was carried out with the following objectives.

- (a) To assess the nature and growth of community colleges in South Tamil Nadu;
- (b) To understand the students' enrolment pattern and their pass-outs in various courses offered through community colleges;
- (c) To assess the infrastructure facilities made available at community colleges;
- (d) To understand the socio-economic background of the students studying in community colleges; and
- (e) To know the students' attitude towards community college, the courses offered and their plan for future.

Research Design

For the purpose of the present study particulars about the number of

community colleges with started year, courses offered, students' enrolment and their respective results from the beginning 1998 to 2005, its governance, and so on were collected. To support the present study, an empirical study was conducted on some selected community colleges. For this, of the total of 32 community colleges functioning in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, and Tuticorin districts, four of them were randomly selected as sample. From these four colleges, 100 students were selected as samples from a total of 220 students. Efforts were taken to include the student-respondents from all the courses offered in these colleges.

The required data were collected from the selected 100 student-respondents by using a structured interview schedule prepared for them. In addition to the interview schedule each college office was approached for collecting details regarding its origin, governance, structure, functioning, composition of courses, and infrastructure – by making personal visits. To arrive at general conclusions the collected data were analysed and interpreted by using descriptive methods like percentage, proportion, ratio and average and presented in summary form. No attempt has been made to form hypotheses since the sample size was too small and accordingly to test them.

Community Colleges in Tamil Nadu: An Appraisal

The number of colleges functioning, their location, governance, courses offered, students' enrolment and their pass-outs in various courses of community colleges

from the beginning are analysed in this section. The analysis reveals that the establishment of community colleges in south Tamil Nadu starts from 1998 and a total of nine colleges were started at that time. The total number of community colleges is increased to 42 at the end of the year 2003. However, the number of colleges declined to 32 because the University's approval has been withdrawn for 10 colleges during the year of 2004–2005. They are serving for the community in three southern districts – Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, and Tuticorin – of the State and at present, there are a total of 32 community colleges functioning in these three districts. Of the total colleges found in these districts 46.9% of them are in Kanniyakumari, followed by Tirunelveli (37.5%), and Tuticorin (15.6%). All they are affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli. Figure 1 portrays this.

It is observed that about 60 per cent of the total community colleges are in rural areas while the remaining 40 per cent serving the needs of the urban community proves that most of the community colleges functioning in the south Tamil Nadu are responding to the educational needs of the rural community and hence the proclaiming of "Find the need and meet it" has been realised.

The colleges are run either by NGOs, Charitable Trusts, or Christian Missionaries. While considering the number of courses offered in community colleges, a minimum of three courses having been offered in some colleges and ranged upto six in some colleges. It is to

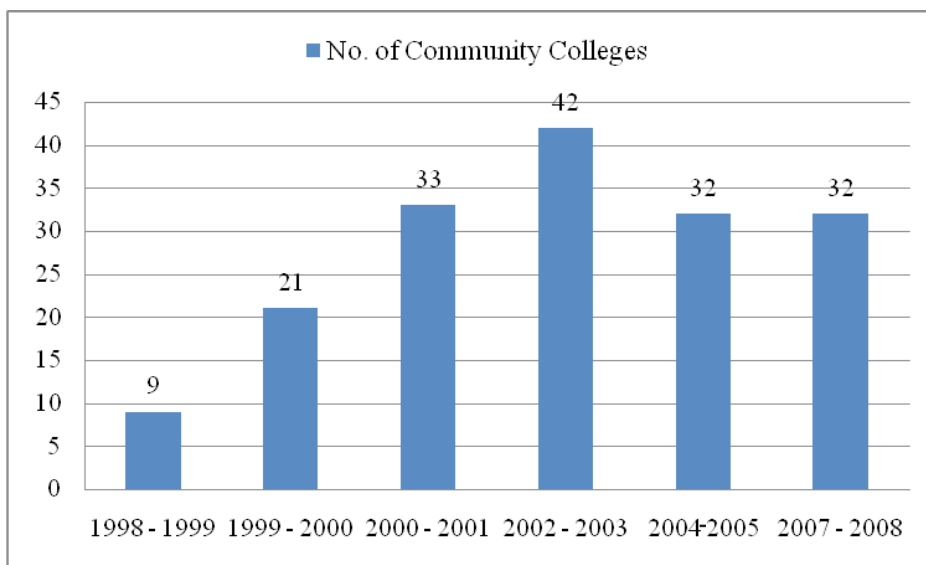


Fig. 1 : Year-wise growth of Community Colleges

be noted that there are a total of 26 programme-courses have been offered through community colleges in these three districts. Most of the colleges offer Computer Applications, Female Nursing Assistance, Pre-school Teachers' Education, and Medical Laboratory Technology courses for study since they are wanted by the majority. Both sexes are admitted in all colleges and, however, some courses like Four Wheeler Mechanism, Two Wheeler Mechanism are kept away for females similarly Pre-school Teachers' Education, Female Nursing Assistance, Home Nursing and Home Remedies, and Tailoring and Embroidery for males.

The wide range of programme-courses of community college has led to the adoption of an open admission policy based on minimum qualification but

without the requirement of any college admission tests which are usually imposed by traditional colleges and universities. Its easy accessibility, open admission, opportunity for low-cost learning, and on-the-job training arrangements attracted the students – particularly poor – towards community colleges. It is proved through the present study that enrolment of students in the courses of community college has been increased from 2.7 per cent to about 20 per cent from the beginning that is from 1998 to 2005. Figure 2 evidences this.

Enrolment and Pass-outs

While considering the students' enrolment in various programme-courses offered at community colleges during the reference period it reveals that three-fourths (75.4%) of the total

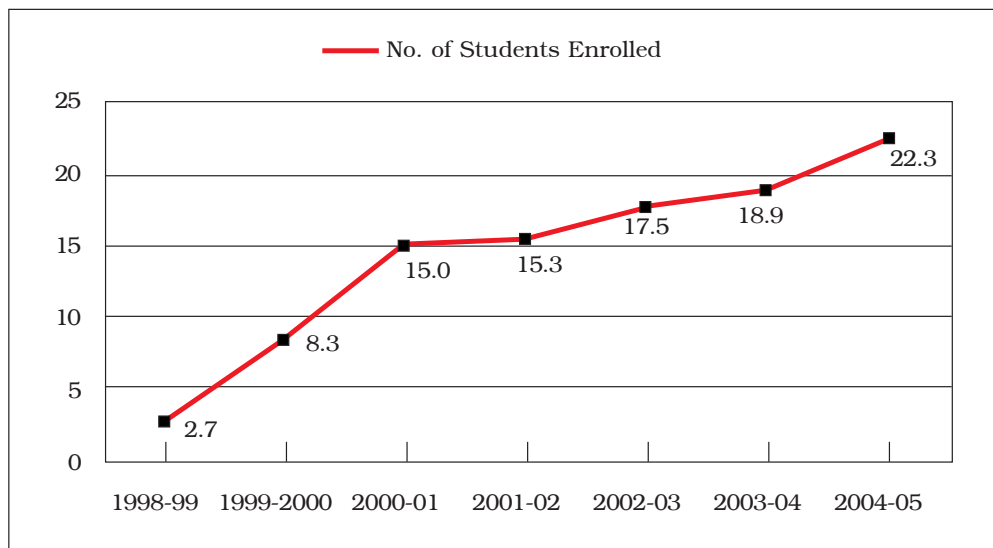


Fig. 2 : Students' Enrolment in Community Colleges: 1998-2005

students studied Female Nursing Assistance (32.1%), Pre-school Teachers' Education (17.9%), Medical Laboratory Technology (13.4%), and Computer Applications (12%) that shows students' preference towards courses for study in community colleges.

The analysis of students' pass-outs in various courses offered at community colleges indicates that 100 per cent results has been achieved in courses like Multipurpose Rural Development Work, Marketing Management, Integrated Farm Development, Two-wheeler Mechanism, Drugless Therapy, Home Nursing and Home Remedies, Tailoring and Embroidery, and Dairy Management and Technology whereas the lowest results (87%) achieved in Physiotherapy, and Information Technology courses. It is important to note that, of the total

students (8,856) appeared in final examinations an average of 97 per cent of them (8,566) obtained diplomas that proves the success of community colleges.

As far as the status of the four community colleges included for the study is concerned two of them are run by Christian institutions and the remaining two are by a non-government organisation (NGO) and a community's trust, each respectively. These organisations, who have ventured into community colleges, run many educational institutions like schools, polytechnics, I.T.I., and colleges. Three of the selected colleges are located in rural while the remaining one is in an urban centre. All the four colleges are started between 1998 and 2000. They offer one-year Diploma programme in

Female Nursing Assistance, Four Wheeler Mechanism, Medical Laboratory Technology, Computer Applications, Printing Technology, Computer Technology, and Pre-school Teachers' Education and admit 30 students in each course as restricted by the University and offered four of these courses at the maximum.

All the community colleges under the study are equipped to run computer-based courses and have at least one computer for two students (1:2). While analysing the infrastructure facilities provided at the community colleges, sports, retiring, and hostel facilities are in progress; students are provided of drinking water adequately and the facilities like lavatory, cycle stand, and library are provided.

Who's Coming to Community Colleges

To understand that who is coming to community colleges the students' socio-economic particulars regarding their sex, age, birth order, religion, caste, parental occupation and their monthly income, place of residence and distance to college, annual expense for their education, and marks secured at higher secondary school leaving examinations are concerned. The analysis of them reveals that more than half of the total strength (60.9%) of the community colleges are girls. Hence, the same truth is reflected in the sample (62%) also. It is found that 56 per cent out of the total students are hailing from rural areas. It is important to mention that community college attracts mostly fresh candidates (81%) who are below of

20 years old. The mean age of community college student is 20. It is evidenced through the present study that a large majority (90%) of the total students have joined the colleges after 'plus two' course while there are some graduates as well as those discontinued their degree courses, and about three-fourths (73%) of the total pursuing Diploma in Four Wheeler Mechanism (28%), Computer Applications (26%), and Medical Laboratory Technology (19%) that shows their interest on professional courses.

The concept of the 'including the excluded' has been realised through community colleges since three-fifths (60%) of the total students belongs to Backward Castes whereas Scheduled Castes and Most Backward Castes constituted 21% and 19%, each respectively. Though at least two colleges under the study are run by Christian affiliated institutions, Hindus (65%) have joined in large number. However, Christians (29%) constituted a sizeable part. The proportion of Muslims is found to be only 6 per cent in the total.

It is clear from the study that community colleges provided chance for candidates with varied background students from all walks of life and have made use of such concept since the students reckoned from Government service (27%), Business (26%), Agriculture (25%), and daily wagers (22%). Therefore, it is understood that the concept of 'equality of opportunity' has been achieved through community colleges.

Community colleges are being utilised by the poor and the needy is evident from the students' parental

income. Their parents earn an average of Rs. 3,840 per month. It is to be noted that the concept of community college has reached smaller families where there is an average of five members and among them the second child has the maximum chance to make use of such colleges.

It is found that a large majority (85%) of the total students selected the course themselves and are not forced. A large number of them sought admission in these colleges because of short duration of courses, employment-oriented courses, and low fee structure. It is significant to mention that low tuition cost attracted many students towards community colleges. It has been evidenced through the study since the average expense for the students is Rs. 5,930 per year and therefore, almost all of them are satisfied towards expense for continuing their education in community colleges.

Nearly three-fourths of the total students are living within an average of 6.3 kilometre radius from their college,

but the distance is not a major problem to commute their college for some students. Half (50%) of the total students reach college either by bicycle or by foot. What the present study evidences that the proximity of these colleges to their place of residence is found to be one of the important factors for the selection of a particular community college for study by the students.

Community college provides opportunities for under-achieved as well as over-achieved students. It is proved through the present study since about half (48%) of the total students secured 600–700 out of 1200 marks in their higher secondary school (+2) leaving examinations. Another 47 per cent in the total secured 700–900 marks. Therefore, it is significant to note that the students who secured an average of 733 (61%) out of 1200 marks seek admissions in community colleges that evidences the importance of such colleges for educationally poor students.

TABLE 1
Mean for Some Selected Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (N=100)</i>
Parental monthly income	Rs. 3,840
Household size	5
Students' birth order	2
Students' age	20
Marks secured in +2 (out of 1200)	733 (61%)
Annual expense	Rs. 5,930
Distance to College from place of residence	6.3 km
Student-computer ratio	2:1

Students' Perception

For the evaluation of community colleges, as a part of the present study students' perception towards students union, arrival of experts for conducting classes, infrastructure facilities availed for them, fee structure, entrepreneurial as well as job opportunities, and the functioning of community college are collected.

While probing is there any organisation for students in community colleges it is found that none of the selected colleges provided the chance for the students to form "Students Union". Of course, the majority of the students strongly felt for it both to press their demands (50%) and express themselves (42%) whereas only few (8%) opined that short duration of the course would not accommodate students union.

It is found that a large majority (72%) of the total students agreed that special classes used to be conducted in their colleges by outside experts. Most (68%) of them said that internship is arranged by their college managements from time to time and nearly three-fourths (73%) of them are satisfied with the usefulness of the practicals/internships made by their colleges.

Most of the students are satisfied about the classroom, facilities provided for practicals and qualification of teachers, and expect more as far as laboratory facility is concerned. All the students of Four Wheeler Mechanism expressed their willingness towards workshop facilities in their college premise. Most of the students are satisfied about the facilities, viz., drinking water, lavatory, cycle stand, and library.

None of the students paid capitation fee for their admission. A vast majority of the students (94%) are in satisfaction about the fee structure for the course. Likewise, the perception of the majority of these students (84%) about expenditure for the course is that of moderate one and more than half of them felt that studying in community college is worthy for time and expenditure.

It is found that a large number (70%) of students are not ready for entrepreneurship risk immediately after the completion of their course as it is costly experiment, and therefore, they prefer experience in job before venturing anything new. More than one-thirds of the total students said that they do not have the necessary capital for starting up self-employment avenues. However, many of them are positive that they could arrange money either from their parents or banks and most of them have positive perception about their parental support to self-employment openings.

The fact that more than half of the total students (58%) are sure about that the community college could alleviate the problem of unemployment whereas another one-fourths in the total does not have any idea regarding this. However, all the colleges making arrangements for on-the-campus interview for their students' job-placement, since almost all of them would like to have. Of course, nearly half of the students (48%) know about the prospects of getting attractive jobs with community college's certificates.

For many students specially designed courses, positive image about community college, parent's wish, and absence of nearly college are the

important factors for the preference towards community college. It is significant to note that about half of the students (49%) do not have any idea about university's role in running the community colleges. However, all they opined that universities should take over community colleges for proper administration, lesser fees, recruitment of efficient teachers and safeguarding them from capitation fee in future. It is to be noted that nearly one-thirds (31%) of the total students do not know the difference between polytechnic, I.T.I, and community college while nearly another two-thirds in the total knew the distinction among these three and also about the courses offered, their duration, fees and teaching, etc. Very few (12%) understood the community college and the nature of duration of the courses. While asking the students' perception about the positive changes in the functioning of community colleges more than half of them (53%) do not have any idea regarding what kind of changes that are possible to make for the effective functioning of such colleges. It is important to note that almost all the students want the teaching language should be their mother tongue.

Conclusion

We may conclude from the present study that the community college has come a long way and going to stay as a viable alternative to empower the

disadvantaged, underprivileged, and excluded through imparting them appropriate skills and making them gainfully employed than the conventional transfer courses offered by a large number of colleges and universities across the country. However, there is a lag found in venturing of community colleges after 2004 so that the factors for such stagnation have to be identified and to be solved. It is an opportunity to encourage community colleges to offer skills, and work-oriented education to meet the needs of the students who have finished formal school education and hence, it would be a multi-campus reality for skill-based education. To impart entrepreneurial interest in students a counselor would be appointed in community colleges and guides for venturing self-employment to be availed to them. As a result, the student community can make use of these job-oriented courses, instead of moving towards transfer kind of education. Therefore, all universities of the State as well the country should take necessary steps both to start and supervise these colleges for the prescribed infrastructure facilities, fee being collected and other facilities necessary for the course, students and teachers. The Constitutional provision of Access, Equity, and Relevance can be achieved by establishing more community colleges in India. Then only community college would become the "College for Community."

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