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The Impact of Service-Learning on University Students’ Academic, Personal and Social Achievements

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Abstract:

This study aims to evaluate the introduction of Service Learning (SL) in university curriculum; the focus is to examine the impact of SL on students’ achievements from academic, personal and social dimensions. To attain this goal, a questionnaire of three sections, each of which consists of six (06) items, was distributed to 40 students at the Department of English language at KasdiMerbah University of Ouargla after introducing them to courses designed on the basis of the four stages of services learning in which they presented their community project. The findings of the current study showed that service learning has positive impact on university students’ academic, personal and social achievements.

Keywords: Service-Learning, Higher Education, EFL Students, Service-Learning Based Course

1. INTRODUCTION

Producing a good man is based on good education. Traditionally, the aim of education is to teach people how to speak and write. Currently, all people know how to speak and/or to write, but they need to know how to handle the life challenges of the 21st century. To attain this goal, education should offer people programs that are organized,

systematic, and based on best practices and services that can promote students' academic, personal-social, and career development (Bryan, 2005) and can guarantee producing the perfect citizens who should possess a civic competence knowing how to rule and be ruled. Countless studies have attempted to develop and suggest strategies that can reflect community-based projects in classroom. Service-learning is one strategy that can be used within classroom, for it can provide students with opportunities to experience meaningful personal/social, academic and career development. Specifically, service learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, the acquisition of skills, knowledge content and the comprehension of citizenship values.

Due to its importance in people's academic, personal, professional and social life, service learning has been embraced in western schools including primary, middle and secondary. As a matter of fact, higher education has a long history relating its work to the public sector as religion, commerce, personal and professional service, agriculture and manufacturing, and the application of science to society (Thomas 1998). Current researches have supported and examined claims that have been made for the value of service learning in higher education. Markus, Howard, and King (1993) prove that students in service learning sections showed higher academic achievement and more positive course evaluations, beliefs and values toward community service. Additionally, Scales et al (2006) claim that service learning can offer a sense of purpose, connection, usefulness and relevance to a student's education. Furthermore, connecting the academic content to community-based projects can motivates students to realize their community needs and boost their citizenship and responsibility. It also improves their personal-social, academic, and career related experiences. This approach fosters students' acceptance of diversity and develops their leadership skills.

However, Algerian universities use traditional methods which are based on lecturing and memorizing to educate students solely for career rather than for a life as responsible citizens, social members, leaders, decision makers, etc. urgently needed in our society. Accordingly, there is a hope to integrate this pedagogical strategy in Algerian university curricula.

2. Definition of Service Learning

The idea of learning to serve the society is dated back to John Dewey and Hilda Taba era, but the use of the term "service learning took a new position in the end of the 19th century; this is because they believe that joining the school curriculum with the students' society can stimulate them to use what they have learnt in the service of their society's problems, development, etc, and this is beneficial for both students and society (Kinsley, 1990). For over a quarter of a century, education researchers and practitioners have struggled to determine how to best define service-learning. According to Sigmon (1979), "If we are to establish clear goals [for service-learning] and work efficiently to meet them, we need to move toward a precise definition."

Dotson-Blake, Dotson, Glass and Lilley (2010) provide a description of service-learning. For them, SL is a method integrated in academic curriculum that gives students an opportunity to speak and/or to write about their experiences lived in real-life situations in their communities. Specifically, it assists students to extend their learning beyond their classroom through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet the actual needs of their community so that to .foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

According to the Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform (1995), service-learning is defined as a method used to enable individuals to learn and develop academic and social skills through active participation in thoughtfully organized volunteer oriented experiences. These experiences are intended to enhance a variety of concepts learned in class, while addressing needs within a community (Wilczenski & Schumacher, 2008).

Sigmon (1979) endeavors to provide a more precise definition of service-learning by comparing different programs that combine service and learning. He arrives at a conclusion that service-learning program is distinguished from other approaches to experiential education. In other words, he describes service learning as a reciprocal learning because it helps both the provider and the recipient to equally benefit from the service; it also ensures an equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. Conrad and Hedin (1991) views service learning as a teaching strategy that integrates the community service within academic learning to unify the objectives of learning with the objectives of community service.

To summarize, service learning can be an inspiring pedagogical approach because it blends meaningful community service with instruction and, thus, enriches learners' learning experience, teaches them civic responsibility, and strengthens communities.

3. The Benefits of Service Learning

A number of studies (Williams, 1991; Furco, 1966; Hatch, 1998; Sax & Astin, 1997; Kahne, Westheimer & Rogers, 2000; McCarthy & Harris, Vickers, 2004; Welch & Billing, 2004; Ethridge, 2006) conducted in different countries which adopt the concept "service learning" have attempted to reveal that this pedagogical approach can help:

1. To increase the students' academic achievement by offering them opportunities to practice what they have learnt in the real field
2. To increase students' awareness of responsibility towards their communities
3. To increase the students' sensation towards the other by the direct effect and contact with the society
4. Individuals in constructing personality, boosting self-confidence and strengthening their ability and readiness to give and/or participate in whatever service helpful to their society
5. Individuals to discover their abilities and skills which may appear only by real practical actions
6. Enhancing human and social communication between individuals
7. Individuals to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills
8. Individuals to accept the social diversity

4. Stages of Service Learning

Kaye (2004) defines and explains the four interconnected stages of SL; they are investigation and preparation, action, reflection and demonstration.

a) Investigation and preparation: During this stage, students specify the issues that need to be addressed using different approaches, such as interviews, surveys, books, the Internet, and personal observations, and the skills, the interests and the talents through analyzing key resources. Additionally, students should clarify their roles, responsibilities, and prerequisite skills for each member of the group. They are also required to develop project timelines. They should collaborate with their community in order to gather different viewpoints about the same problem. These points help them to know about the "historical, sociological, cultural, economic, and political contexts that underlie the needs or issues" (Jacoby 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, experiential learning is associated with critical analysis leading students to locate their service within a social context through academic readings.

b) Action: during this stage, students implement their organized project applying directly or indirectly the newly acquired knowledge about the community issues representing a collaborative and safe environment to learn and grow.

c) Reflection: this stage is replaceable. That is to say it can be before, during, and after the service and joins all stages of SL. Reflection incorporates experiences and promotes empathy for others, so it aids students to locate emotional, cognitive, and social features of experience into a larger context. The performance of students can be executed through different reflection activities: reflection journals, group in-class or online discussions, directed writings, portfolios, role-play, etc. They are required to activate their critical reflection, recognize the impact of their service on the community and themselves.

d) Demonstration: in this stage, students recapitulate and present experiences of their SL-based project results employing information collected in all aforementioned stages through public presentations, blogs, portfolios, videos, and other ways of communication for further improvement.

5. Studies on The implementation of Service Learning

Service learning plays a crucial role in western education including schools, colleges and universities. This idea has attracted the attention of several scholars who scrutinize the use of service learning from faculty, teacher and students dimensions.

Hammond (1994) reported the results of a survey distributed to 130 faculties throughout the state of Michigan which incorporated service learning in courses. Its findings showed the positive attitudes of the respondents towards service-learning and its effectiveness in representing the disciplinary content material, enhancing students' critical thinking skills, and assuring self-directed learning.

Hesser (1995) reported that incorporating service-learning into courses helps students to improve their written communication skills, their critical thinking/ analytic skills, their problem solving skills, and their understanding of key concepts and ideas from the course.

In his study which is conducted in Hong Kong, Chan (2009) examines the extent to which the new items are related to Hong Kong society. In fact, the new items are included in the curriculum in 2008 to join students with their community in these philanthropic service learning projects. The findings of this study showed that the included activities become more related between the learning process and the society.

In their investigation, Sundeen and Raskoff (1998) attempted to look into the role of secondary school curriculum in California, in USA, in encouraging on service learning among learners. The results obtained from this study reveal that programs consider and support service learning activities which emphasize social solidarity, responsibility and conserving public properties. Besides, it demonstrates that there is a difference between public and private schools as to encouraging service learning; the programs of private schools focused on the notion and activities of service learning more than the programs of public school.

In his study, the subject of which was tolerance, conducted in Bloomington in Indiana, a USA state, Boyte (1991) arrives at a conclusion that projects of service learning based on tolerance influence to a great extent; it make students more motivated and excited in the work, and it provides them with the possibility of finding a job after their graduation. Also, the findings prove that service learning is beneficial not only to the students but also the local society.

Further researches carried by Williams (1991) and Conrad (1980) show that the students who participate in service learning improve their skills and achievement more than those who do not participate.

In a study of the effects of service-learning on undergraduate students' learning outcomes in a political science course, Markus, Howard & King (1993) report that students who participated in the service-learning sections of the course work better than students who participated in traditional sections.

The significant findings from the above- stated and many other international researches have assessed the impact of service learning on students' achievement, and this indicates that service learning has a positive effect on students in several areas. The motive behind conducting the present study is the lack of studies which are interested in the implementation of service learning as an effective pedagogical approach in the Algerian higher education.

6. Statement of Purpose

Teaching practices and strategies recognized in Algerian higher education are traditional and based on lecturing and memorizing. Due to the importance of students' participation in the social associations and institutions of their community, the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education, especially after introducing the LMD system, make efforts to offer students an excellent education that integrates practical activities, skills and volunteering actions in the university curricula that can guarantee training for all students to serve their society, developing their environment and to deepen their connection with them. For this reason, service-learning projects must be clearly incorporated in university curricula to perform its objective in an acceptable way, and execute the needs and the wants of students as well as the needs of their local society. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to introduce a service learning- based course in university classroom and evaluate its impact on students' realization from academic, personal and social dimensions. This study intends to answer the following question: Does service learning have positive impact on students' realization from academic, personal and social dimensions? This question led to postulate this hypothesis: Service learning may have positive impact on students' academic, personal and social realizations.

7. Method and Tools:

7.1. Research Instrument

To obtain the aforementioned objective, this study adopts one research instruments: a close- ended questionnaire which is delivered to the participants to elicit their realizations after service learning course. It consists of three sections: academic, personal and social, each of which contains (6) statements. The questionnaire is distributed after service learning course.

7.2. Participants

The participants of this study are second year LMD students at the department of English at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla. The sample is a group consisting of twenty five (25). The participants are selected due to certain reasons. First, they are adults and need no parental permission to participate in this investigation. Second, they have studied English language at least for eight years, so they have, if not good, acceptable command of English.

The participants are selected by means of non-probability sampling design where the participants are gathered in a process that does not give all of the population equal chances of being selected and they represent only themselves, but not the wider population (Cohen et al, 2007). Therefore, the results obtained cannot be generalized to the entire population. Non-probability sample comes in several forms (Cohen et al, 2007) among which convenience sampling is opted for in this study. Convenience sampling is simply a technique where the participants are selected for they are available and accessible to the researcher (ibid). Though convenience sampling often suffers from a number of biases, and

lacks external validity, it is cost- and time-effective technique (Saumure & Given, 2008) and it may improve internal validity (Shuttleworth, 2009).

7.3. Research Procedure

The researcher designs a service learning course which is organized on the basis of the four strategies of service learning: investigation/preparation, action, reflection and demonstration. This service learning course is divided into five sessions. The course is included in oral comprehension module; students are required to report their achievement in the community-based project in each session, to be presented in the classroom. Students were asked to investigate one of the community problems.

In the first session, students presented their selected community problem which is helping people focusing on patients because they need medicaments and a large amount of money for medical treatment. The aim behind selecting this decision is to ingrain and boost up the social solidarity within the Algerian society. They introduced videos recording their visits to hospital interviewing patients about their needs. Charitable associations' members were also consulted to assist them to know how to collect money from people and medicaments from pharmacies and dispensaries.

In the second session, they presented their project plan which is the results of two working weeks. After visiting associations and hospital, they create a plan to fix their objectives and destinations. They were divided into groups each of which accomplishes certain tasks in order to share responsibilities and to make more efforts to finish in the due date.

In the third session, they reported their attitudes towards the project. In the last session, they exposed their final report of the project emphasizing the benefits achieved by different sides: patients, associations, doctors, people and students themselves.

Demonstration: in this stage, students summarize their SL experience drawing on all aforementioned stages, and use project results for improvement. During demonstration, practical activities may include public presentations, blogs, portfolios, videos, and other ways of communicating developed competencies and achieved outcomes within the community.

After one week, the students came to the session, and they were given a questionnaire to fill in.

8. Results and Discussion

The participants' responses were analyzed according to their agreement to the items within each section. The analysis of the data yielded the following results.

8.1. Service Learning Course and Academic Achievement

The first section of the questionnaire consists of six statements dealing with impact of community project on students' academic achievement. The results obtained from this section are presented in Table 1. A: agree N: neutral D: disagree

Table 1. The Impact of the Project on Students' Academic Achievement

N	Statements	A	N	D
01	The activities of the project help me to improve my speaking	95%	05%	00%
02	The activities of the project positively change my vision towards teamwork	90%	08%	02%

03	The activities of the project motivate me to regularly attend oral sessions	98%	02%	00%
04	The activities of the project improve my public speaking	95%	03%	02%
05	The activities of the project help me to actively participate in the classroom assignments	97%	03%	00%
06	The community-based project makes the oral sessions interesting, enjoyable and motivating	98%	02%	00%

The results in Table 1 illustrate the impact of the community project on the students' academic achievement. For the first item, the results reveal that the majority of the participants (95%) do agree that the activities of the project improve their speaking; the other students (05%) remained neutral; they do not show their agreement or disagreement. This can be interpreted that the project provides them with numerous ideas that they expressed during sessions. Concerning the second item, the greater part of the participants (90%) expresses their agreement that due to the activities of the project positively they come to prefer teamwork more rather than individual work; whereas the remaining participants are divided into two unequal parts the greater (08%) was neutral and the smaller (02%) was disagree. Thus, dividing the project into sub-tasks helps students to share missions and experiences, and, hence; to prefer teamwork than individual work. In the third element, it appears in the table that the best part of the participants (98%) becomes motivated to regularly attend oral sessions because of the activities of the project; however, the minor of students (02%) keep on their neutrality. This can be explained by their interest in the project and its activities. As to the fourth component, 95% of the participants show their agreement in relation to the improvement of their public speaking as a result of the community project; the rest is separated into two parts (03%) and (02%) of which responses are neutral and disagree, respectively. Concerning the fifth element, results reveal that the majority of the participants (97%) do agree the activities of the project help them to actively participate in the classroom assignments. Furthermore, the remaining students (03%) refused to take one of the two sides. This is theorized to be the result of having a number of ideas. Specifically, as students attained more experiences and more ideas, they became interested in oral session and not afraid to speak publicly to communicate their experiences and to inform their ideas with their friends. Last but not least, the largest part of the participants (98%) does agree that the community-based project makes the oral sessions interesting, enjoyable and motivating, but 02% of the students took neutral status. Accordingly, these results prove that the service learning enhances the students' academic realizations including public speaking, regular attending the interesting, enjoyable and enriching oral sessions, actively participation and their preference to the teamwork. In particular, through this type of learning, the academic benefits are achieved by the students.

8.2. Service Learning Course and Personal Achievement

The second section of the questionnaire also contains six statements which concern the students' personal achievement from the community-based project. Table 2 illustrates the results: A: agree N: neutral D: disagree

Table 2. The Impact of the Project on Students' Personal Achievement

N	Statements	A	N	D
01	The project increases my self confidence and my belief towards my ideas	89%	07%	04%
02	The project improves my problem solving skills, and increases my interest in solving problems that concern my society	93%	03%	04%
03	The project enhances my communication skills	90%	09%	01%
04	The project fosters my personal visions and self development	88%	09%	03%
05	The project helps me to accept people diversity	96%	04%	00%
06	The project makes me to be more fair, loyal, generous and optimist	99%	01%	00%

The results in Table 2 emphasize the students' personal achievements from the activities of the project. In view of the participants' answer of the first statement, it appears that the project increases 89% of the students' self-confidence and belief towards their ideas many of which are used during the project; whereas few participants are parted into two divisions: (07%) and (04%) if the former kept on neutral the latter showed their disagreement. For the second item, the majority of the students (93%) declared their agreement that the project improves their problem solving skills, and increases their interest in solving problems of their society. On the other hand, the other students replied either by neutral (03%) or disagreement (04%). Most of the students (90%) who have answered the item (03) have confirmed that their communication skills had been enhanced due to the activities project. Whereas, the rest of students remained either neutral (09%) or disagreed the statement (01%). This may be because they met a number of people during the project. Next, the results tabulated for the fourth statement revealed that (88%) of students responded that the project fosters their personal visions and self-development. While, 09% of the students maintain their neutrality, and 01% disagreed. Concerning the fifth element, we can notice that the majority of students (96%) claimed that after the project they started to accept people diversity. Unlike the rest of students (04%) who stated that their neutrality, but no participant disagrees the statement. This is theorized to be the result of encountering different people from different regions when conducting the project. Concerning the last item, the table shows that after the project almost all of the students (99%) became fair, loyal, generous and optimist more than they were after. On the contrary, only 01% remained neutral. The reason behind this was cooperation, collaboration, philanthropy, sharing experiences to attain one general charitable objective.

8.3. Service Learning Course and Social Achievement

In the third section of the questionnaire, there are also six statements which concern the students' social achievement from the community-based project. Table 3 illustrates the results. A: agree N: neutral D: disagree

Table 3. The Impact of the Project on Students' Social Achievement

N	Statements	A	N	D
1	The project offers me an opportunity to perceive different issues of citizens	05%	03%	02%
02	The project helps me to develop social relationships with different people	08%	02%	00%
03	The project helps me to understand my responsibility towards the society	03%	07%	00%
04	The project assists me to know how to responsibly act towards social issues in my community and other communities	03%	05%	02%
05	The project helps me to partake other charitable social projects	06%	04%	00%
06	The project extends my knowledge concerning the rights of citizens	08%	02%	00%

The results in Table 3 point up the impact of the community project on the students' social achievement. Firstly, the majority of the participants (95%) agree that project helps them to perceive different issues of citizens. For the second item, almost all of the participants (98%) express their agreement that due to the project they developed social relationships with different people. Next, as for the third and the fourth items, the project develops 93% of the students' responsibility towards the society assisting them to responsibly act towards social issues whether inside their community or abroad. Before the last item, this project motivates 96% of the students to partake other charitable social projects. Finally, the majority of the students (98%) do agree the project enlarges their knowledge concerning the rights of citizens. Accordingly, these results demonstrate that the service learning enhances the students' social realizations including perceiving social issues, developing social relationships and their responsibility towards society, participating in other charitable social projects and recognizing the rights of citizens. In particular, through service learning, the social benefits are realized. This indicates the important role of this learning in joining the students to their society and fostering the notion and the values of citizenship. In other words, engaging students in service-learning can turn them to be productive citizens who show care, concern and desire to assist others both in our communities and abroad.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study is to implement service learning in university education. The focus is to evaluate service learning's impact on students' realization from academic, personal and social dimensions. The findings of this study are summarized in two points. First, university students showed positive attitudes towards the community project. Second, their participation in the community project helps them to be academically successful, personally flourishing and socially engaged. To answer the research question, the findings show that service learning has a positive impact on students' realizations from academic,

personal and social dimensions in higher education. These encouraging results provide us with a viable starting-point for implementing service learning in higher education curricula to produce students profitable to their society.

This study has some pedagogical implications:

1. Incorporating real practical skills within the university academic curricula in order to help student benefit from service learning.
2. Creating specialized administrative units within the university, of which concern is the coordination with external establishments and companies offering administrative facilities and financial support.
3. Listing the needs of the social categories that need specific services from the university, making these lists as a reference and a concern for teachers' teaching missions and students' future scientific research projects.
4. Sensitizing educators, practitioners and students about service learning through different ways: visiting different social workshops and showing the positive impact of SL on students, teachers, university, people, associations etc.
5. Informing and stimulating the schooling corps about this enriching pedagogical approach through encouraging the best projects.

Though the researcher has made significant efforts to attain a satisfactory level of objectivity throughout the study, the current study has some limitations:

1. Students worked in different situations, classroom, charitable associations, hospital, pharmacies, houses, etc. This requires more time and much effort for the students contact each other.
2. Students find difficulties to devote some time for the community project among the hours of their university studies.
3. The rejection and the limitedness of some establishments put more pressure on students to spend more time to convince them to cooperate in the project; this may be due to the lack of knowledge as to service learning.
4. The university lacks specialized administrative units that concern the coordination with external establishments and companies, offer administrative facilities and financial support.

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