

Promoting Citizen Leadership among Students through Service-Learning

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Abstract

Today's societies need citizen leaders to address the complex and fast occurring challenges. Service-learning is growing as leadership development pedagogy. Engaging students in service-learning creates a synergy to acquire essential leadership skills necessary for them to enter the job market upon their graduation. This paper discusses the possibilities of transforming the students into active citizen through service-learning. Previous research suggests that incorporation of service-learning in higher education has proved to be efficacious to prepare the students as future leaders and vibrant citizens. Much literature is available on the relationship between service-learning and citizen leadership from the developed world perspective. However, little studies exist on this field of research in developing world perspective, especially in the context of Pakistan. This concept paper critically assesses how such innovative pedagogies can play significant role to prepare an arsenal of citizen leaders in higher education of Pakistan. Based on this assessment, the paper addresses the need of higher education in Pakistan for developing leadership skills of graduates to prepare them as future active citizen leaders.

Keywords: service-learning, citizen leaders, students, higher education

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is rapidly emerging as a leadership development strategy in higher education (Furco, 2002). A major shift is taking place in the role of higher education after the emergence of service-

learning as pedagogy (Butin, 2003). Researchers believe that traditional ways of teaching and learning such as lecturing or transmission methods are no more valuable and effective for preparing and training of future citizen leaders, because, these methods makes the learners dependent and passive. Students

merely get knowledge about leadership but they cannot practice it. This gap was bridged by service-learning by providing learners wider opportunities to not only understand the concept of leadership and but also know how to practice it in a real life situation (Westheimer&Kahne, 2004).

Present day societies need more active citizen leaders due to the fast changes taking place in every part of life. In this scenario, higher education institutions are seen as the main institutions to prepare future citizen leaders who could not only grapple with the existing challenges but also inspire and guide the coming generations towards a better world (Barnett, Silver & Grundy, 2010). Writers suggest that with the increasing trends and changes in the present day digital age, the role of higher education needs to be redefined and bordered. This trend has occurred most recently in higher education where service-learning is used as an approach to prepare future citizen leaders using community context rather than classroom as a learning platform. Unlike, previous practices where higher education institutions dominantly focused on transmitting knowledge and information to students through traditional pedagogical means and instructional techniques, However, more recently, the attention of researchers and educators has shifted towards self-directed and more independent teaching and learning approaches (Butin, 2006).

Service-learning has already been used and found useful as pedagogy for leadership training. For example, in USA many renowned universities have adopted service-learning as pedagogy for preparing future citizens leaders. This was already incorporated in the curriculum of higher education through the initiative “learn and serve America”. This strategy proved very successful in promoting effective citizenship skills of people. Thus service-learning is considered as a movement rather than a teaching and learning strategy (Westheimer&Kahne, 2004).

Researchers also strongly believe that as an instructional method service-learning has already proved its academic strength. Hence, it justifiably plays an important and key role in developing leadership skills of future citizens (Liu, 1995; Lueddeke, 2003). However, other researchers are still skeptical in this regard and believe that there is a need to redefine the goals and strategies of institutes of higher learning in least developed world, particularly in context of citizen leadership roles of people

(Bringle& Hatcher, 2000). This paper contributes to this gap in the current literature by reviewing the existing literature on the role of service-learning as pedagogy to prepare future citizen leaders. Hence, based on the review of literature, the major purpose of this paper is to suggest ways to higher education institutions how to use service-learning as a pedagogical tool to prepare future citizen leaders.

Service-learning has already made a debut in the field of higher education around the world. However, there are still many questions unanswered related to the pedagogical role of service-learning such as how service-learning can contribute towards developing the citizen leadership skills of students? What are the parameters with which service-learning will be operated in universities and colleges which are already occupied with transmission of knowledge methodologies? How service-learning contributes towards development of leadership skills of students by using real life experiences (Antonio, Astin& Cross, 2000). Researchers believe that integration of service-learning in higher education institutions by creating learning communities will help the students acquire improved citizen leadership skills. This goal can be achieved by engaging students in practical situations where they demonstrate their abilities and skills (Bell, Furco, Ammon, Muller, & Sorgen, 2000). Thus it is suggested that higher education institutions should enable students to participate in such learning which provides them real opportunity to learn and practice leadership. For this purpose, there is a need of sustainable collaborations between the higher education institutions and communities. In this paper I attempt to query how and to what extent service-learning can help achieve this long standing need of Pakistani higher education and how it can be embedded within the academic parameters of higher education institutions. More specifically, this paper assesses the pedagogical role of service-learning as a teaching and learning method for preparing civic leaders through higher education.

1.2 SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning is an educational method that enables students to participate in active learning that develops their abilities. This participation meets the needs of communities on one hand and students academic development on the other (Butin, 2003). Service-learning is a method of teaching that provides students opportunities to acquire and apply their

knowledge and skills for addressing real life needs in the communities (McPherson, 2005). Highlighting the importance of service-learning Eyler and Giles (1999) have stated that “service-learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs in a cyclic action and reflection when the students work through application of their knowledge and skills gained in the classroom for solving community problems as well as reflecting on the experience that they have in the community”. This helps them to achieve their objectives of serving the communities by meeting their needs and developing deeper understanding of the issues and problems. Other writers have suggested and stressed on providing structured environment to students to enable them to make discoveries in their own styles of leadership during service-learning activity (Rama, Ravenscroft, Walcott & Zlotkowski, 2000). This may happen when they will lead, communicate and take decisions related to issues and explore solutions through constructive criticism with faculty members, other students, community representatives they serve. This study defines the people engaged together in an intellectual discourse and interaction for enhancing learning, as a learning community (Cross, 1998).

1.3 SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Service-learning is becoming rapidly popular in higher education around the world. In the developed world, it has already been recognized and integrated in higher education institutions due to its effectiveness as a method to prepare citizen leadership (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For example, in USA, according to estimation, more than 950 universities and colleges have joined the membership of Campus Compact. These higher education institutions are deeply committed for promoting citizenship purpose of higher education especially focusing civic leaders. Thousands of faculties are fully engaged with college and university students in developing and practicing service-learning every year. However, on the other hand, in the developing world, service-learning is now gaining recognition as a civic leadership development method. But still researchers and practitioners are looking to answer many questions related to its application and implications in the context of higher education (Said, Ahmad, Hassan & Awang, 2015). For example, among the major issues are resource mobilization,

collaboration and community engagement. In the developing world context, the higher education institutions are more or less geared towards knowledge transmission rather sharing and construction (Yurio & Ye, 2011).

Service-learning is a transformative teaching and learning method. It is rooted in the constructivist perspective of education where students are supposed to reconstruct their knowledge by applying the newly gained information and skills in real life situations. This philosophy of education encourages students to work independently and creatively. However, in the developing world context, the pedagogical practices in higher education are mostly based on transmission philosophy that encourages students to rote learn content and reproduce it on demand of the teacher. These issues exist in almost all the higher education institutions in the developing world (Daly, Baker & Williams, 2013).

The spread of service-learning over the last decades in higher education in the developed world has provided new insights for the developing world to embrace service-learning as a scholarship of engagement. For producing citizen leaders, there is an urgent need to institutionalize service-learning at higher education in graduate and undergraduate research community based research as well as developing stronger relationships with the local communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). This will provide new outlooks and venues to the institutions of higher education in the developing world. In the context of developing world especially in Pakistan, there is much need to prepare active and responsible citizen leaders rather than using transitive practices to produce passive citizens.

As a scholarship of engagement in higher education, service-learning creates a link between theory and practice, cognitive and affective domains and educational institutions and communities. The role of service-learning as a civic pedagogy breaks the bifurcation of academic goals with live reality for promoting critical inquiry and reflective practice across complex, local, national and international scenarios. Currently, the most debated issue related to application of service-learning in higher education is about its academic identity whether it should be integrated and treated as a curriculum or co-curriculum course (Bringle, & Steinberg, 2010). Unlike the developed world, in the developing world,

service-learning is still recognized as traditional pedagogy and declared as co-curricular activity and its foot prints are still uncertain. It is considered a thread to the age old and well positioned traditional pedagogies (Said, Ahmad, Mansoor&Awang, 2015).

Currently, service-learning advocates have started devoting intensive efforts for institutionalizing service-learning within higher education (Felten& Clayton, 2011). As service-learning theory and practice has attained recognitions and a critical mass around the developed world as a civic pedagogy much attention is needed to be paid towards its role in promoting civic goals of higher education in the developing world context especially in Pakistani context where service-learning has recently emerged as a teaching and learning pedagogy at school level. It is yet to be institutionalized in the higher education. In this article, we take the opportunity to critically look at the possible pedagogical role of service-learning in preparing the much coveted and long demanding need of developing citizen leaders of Pakistani society which has not yet realized due to application of traditional transmission based teaching and learning pedagogies.

Service-learning possesses immense transformational ability to prepare civic leaders through higher education (Butin, 2003). It has already been recognized as an unrelenting, immersive and substantial pedagogy. However, there is a need to further foster its application in higher education by explicating the currently practiced academic fundamentals and instructive practices which may constrain or unravel the application and implementation of service-learning in Pakistani higher education context and the challenges need to be identified and addressed. This will offer substantial alternatives and opportunities to integrate and institutionalize service-learning in the higher education of Pakistan.

1.4 SERVICE-LEARNING AND CITIZEN LEADERSHIP

Service-learning provides students ample opportunity to learn and practice leadership during service experience by discovering endowments, gaining meaningful peculiar intuitions about “who they are and what they are able to do, and who they would like to become” (Gottlieb, & Robinson, 2006). Moreover, participation in service-learning helps students in

shaping their morals, ambitions and occupational trajectories which ultimately improves their leadership vision and skills as they work in cooperation with student body. Students absorb that operative and vibrant leadership gives opportunity to others by encouraging them to actively participate. This creates a synergy for developing a learning community in which students learn leadership and practice it (Eyler& Giles, 1999).

Leadership is defined as the ability through which people inspire others for making them to make commitment for accomplishing organizational goals (Goetsch, 1992). Most of the organizations today put a demand for effective leadership from the higher education institutions. They expect the higher education institutions to prepare active citizen leaders. It is essential that higher education institutions should focus their attention from transmitting merely knowledge to enabling them to create knowledge, critique their own role and practice leadership. This can be purposefully done by integrating service-learning in the curriculum of higher education institutions as a compulsory course. For this purpose, essential different leadership skills can be included in the course like communicating, planning decision-making and evaluating which are compulsory for people to lead others. These skills may be taught through service-learning in the community in a real life situation (Govekar& Rishi, 2007).

Service-learning in higher education will increase these leadership skills through learning and action in the community. This also enhances the critical thinking and organizational leadership skills necessary for managing human and material resources in the organisational context. Using a service-learning experience, the citizen leadership skills of students can be assessed in many ways such as cooperative education, internships, job shadowing and so on. Service-learning has yet to emerge in higher education of Pakistan, hence, most students will benefit from this if it is integrated in the curriculum of higher education. Service-learning provides wider avenues for students for putting into practice their knowledge gained in the typical traditional classroom.

It is strongly believed that integration of service-learning should enable students to interpret their own experiences and think like leaders. They should be

able to generate ideas for taking decisions, communicate effectively orally and visually to others as leaders. For this purpose, the service-learning supervisors must set personal and collective goals for students to accomplish over a period of time through service-learning platform based on the principles of effective leadership, active citizenship and participative servant leaders (Kahne, Westheimer & Rogers, 2000).

1.5 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

The advocates of service-learning see it as a transformative pedagogy. It connects classroom with the real world experiences, theory with practice, cognitive with affective. It negates the banking concept of education where students are treated as passive recipients rather than active participants and creator of new knowledge. It also negates the role of faculty members as merely transferor of discrete and quantifiable knowledge. On the other hand, service-learning fosters respect for each other, reciprocity of colleges and universities with the community (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001).

Service-learning is extensively been used in educational institutions all over the world. However, it has been observed that still 83% of the faculty use lecturing as the primary instructional method in the classrooms (King, 2004). Thus irrespective of the epistemological differences, a large number of faculties in higher education prefer the normative model of teaching and learning which non service-learning oriented. Thus there appears to be a very limited use of service-learning in higher education institutions. There is need to develop a consensus among service-learning practitioners that how it can be used as a tool for preparing active citizen leaders through higher education. Otherwise, service-learning literature is full of discussion on how students may understand cultural differences and social justice issues in the community by participating in service-learning (Furco, 2002).

There are issues associated with service-learning pedagogy. It may be a luxury for many students but many others cannot afford it in terms of time, resources or job opportunities. In the present day, service-learning is beginning to explore these theoretical and pragmatic dilemmas in the field of higher education in the context of developing world

where service-learning is still considered an expensive educational enterprise (Lane, 2008). In this regard, arguments about the pedagogical implications of service-learning in higher education can be made based on the transformationalist and incrementalist perspectives. The former argues that these issues of service-learning related to its applications in and implications for higher education may take more time to be resolved. But the later argues that these issues will be become irrelevant after some time in higher education (Butin, 2003; Prentice, 2011). Despite the debate about the pedagogical implications of service-learning in higher education, majority of the service-learning researchers believe that service-learning improves leadership skills of students who participate in it. This has been proved through feedback from employers in many organizations. For example, as compared to service-learning, students from the traditional classroom a large number of students entering in different fields have little or no impact in terms of leadership roles as employees. This was also observed in one study that students who participated in service-learning demonstrated better leadership skills in organizational operations (Morgan & Streb, 2003).

Researchers argue that this becomes possible when students are engaged in hands on experience during service-learning activity. It is interesting to see that students who participate in service-learning show extra willingness to take more time to serve community people and solve the problems faced by people in underprivileged areas (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). It is also suggested that this type of on-campus hands on experience opportunity may be provided to students of higher education institutions like colleges and universities to help them with the necessary hands on skills and professional skills as citizen leaders (Quezada & Christopherson, 2005).

1.6 CONCLUSION

Service-learning enables students of higher education to gain valuable leadership skills. As a result of participating in service-learning, students develop different leadership skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, public speaking, decision-making and interpersonal skills. The service-learning experience helps them to redefine their communication, teamwork and leadership skills

through receiving feedback from their peers, faculty members and community workers. Based on the review, it is suggested that service-learning may be introduced in the higher education institutions as a compulsory curriculum course rather than a supplementary co-curricular subject. Although, service-learning cannot change the face of higher education, however, it may produce citizen leaders who are better equipped to face the fast emerging changes and challenges of the present age both in the developed and developing world context. As a developing country, Pakistan also faces many issues such as terrorism, political instability, social disharmony, communal disruptions and lack of public service attitude. Integration of service-learning as a civic pedagogy in its higher education institutions may contribute towards mitigating and minimizing these issues. Service-learning is a transformative teaching pedagogy not a radical theory. Rather it is a disciplined change through participation and reciprocation rather than isolation and dictation like the traditional lecturing method of teaching and learning. There is a need that researchers and practitioners must redefine service-learning as a universal, coherent and neutral pedagogical practice while deciding about its application in higher education.

The integration of service-learning has already begun in the developed world context, where students find wider opportunities to put their theoretical knowledge and skills into practice while working with community, peers and faculty members in community context during service-learning activity. This hands-on-experience has boosted leadership skills among the students. However, there is a need to promote the integration of service-learning in higher education of the developing world including Pakistan where it is still in its infancy stage as citizen leadership development pedagogy.

For integrating service-learning in higher education in the context of developing world especially in Pakistan, it is essential that managers and practitioners must precisely decide about service-learning as an academic tool to develop citizen leaders. For this purpose, there is a need to answer few question such as how service-learning will sustain itself as an academic discipline within the age old normative models of teaching and learning, how service-learning will control its knowledge

production, what type of debate and discussion may help to enfranchise service-learning in the higher education institutions and to face the challenges, what issues are worthy of study in higher education by using service-learning, what mode of inquiry is needed and to what ends. This paper suggests that service-learning models, practice and policies must be thoroughly studied for institutionalizing service-learning in the higher education as a methodology for preparing citizen leaders.

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