

The Advantages and Challenges faced by the Students of Learning English as a Foreign Language During Service-Learning Participation

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Abstract

Service learning encourages students to learn multiple skills by actively participating in the community services. It facilitates students to directly be in contact and engage with those whom the services are being provided outside the classroom. Teachers encourages students to participate in the service-learning activities through different projects conducted at higher education level. But still there is very limited research available regarding the positive impact of service-learning activities on learning capabilities of the students and enhancements of various skills among them. Likewise, the challenges associated with these activities are less explore. Therefore, following study aimed to examines the major advantages and challenges that the students experience in the process of Service learning in their different majors. A qualitative approach was adopted, and interviews were conducted from students at the United Arab Emirates University. By applying modern statistical analysis software (NVivo), the reflections of 25 students were analyzed to explore about their experience and involvement in Service-Learning activities the results revealed that most of the students reflected that they were able to get and improve various language learning skills, communication skills and carrier growth opportunities with the help of their services while working in the community or in the universities. Apart from this, students indicated that they faced some difficulties in terms of fixing their work schedule with that of their course timing that prevented them from engaging into the Service Learning. Study further provide recommendation for future researchers as well as teachers and practitioners.

Keywords: Service Learning, English language learning skills, Communication skills, Carrera growth opportunities, challenges, NVivo

Introduction

Service learning is an educational and learning practice that incorporates meaningful community service with education and reflection to supplement the learning knowledge and clarify community responsibility (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2020). In general it is method of learning that involves a combination of both the classroom instruction that one receives from a school along with service activities that are meant to address community needs, outside the University (Duffy, 2019). It is a form of active learning that values critical thinking (an objective analysis of an issue), problem solving and reflection on behalf of the individual engaged in the service (Huda et al., 2018). Thus, service learning holds the potential to broaden and significantly enhance the learning climate of the students (Knapp, Fisher, & Levesque-Bristol, 2010). It provides a "hands on" experience that enables the individual to develop his/her academic as well as no academic skills and community connections. Therefore, such a kind of learning usually occurs when there is a balance between the goals of learning and service providing. The purpose of the research is to describe service learning along with the examination of some of its aspects.

Meticulously established and implemented learning experiences, such as simulations, project-based coursework, case studies, and presentations, have become efficient learning tools within the language learning curriculum. Use of these tools results into enhanced abilities of the students to learn different languages resulting into development of the technical, knowledge, professional skills and on the top of that communication skills (Hoxmeier & Lenk, 2020). As according to the Lee Schulman, the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching "Learning is the least useful when it is private; it is most useful when it is public and communal," (Eyler & Giles Jr, 1999, p. 15).

The purpose of the study is to examine the different dimensions of using service learning within the learning environment, the difficulty which might appear, and the advantages or the benefits that would be gained in different colleges in UAE University. More specifically, the purpose of the study is to recognize the main factors and explore them to decide which influences cause the students' enhancement of skills. This study will explore in detail the effects of service learning on the intellectual and touching development of students, and the ways learning is heightened by service. More specifically, the study will examine if service learning would have either negative or positive outcomes upon the development of students' success in different phases, and what values have been added to the instructive process associated with current teaching system and how students might benefit from attending the service learning program.

In accordance with Ruiz-Montero et al. (2020) service learning approach is best in training the language learning students by allowing them to learn in in real conditions. Therefore, current study is established on a qualitative approach i.e. service-learning to teaching and assessing the learning of English as a foreign language along with other advantages associated with the service learning practices among the higher education students based on understanding that service leaning embrace the real word demands regarding learnings skills and abilities (Folgueiras et al., 2020). The interviews were held with 30 students regarding the experience of their involvement in Service Learning. Face to face interviews with the informants were conducted. Informal interviews with students were video-recorded and field notes were taken. Each interview took almost 40 minutes.

The data was analysis using NVivo software, coding and themes were derived concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports. During this process, the interviews' findings were

interpreted based on multiple analysis and results. going on and the researcher will write memos to write them in the final report. The study will raise awareness in educational institutions regarding students' advantages and challenges and try to resolve their challenges. Moreover, the study will help the students to take greater part in service learning to develop their skills. In addition to this, it might assist the academic supervisors know the difficulties of participants in service learning and to avoid these difficulties in future.

Literature Review

Service-learning is a teaching and learning experience that defines itself for everyone who takes part in a service-learning program. Also, service learning is a powerful experience to create an intergenerational and intercultural pathway to exchange and engage in a meaningful activity to gain momentum towards life purpose by focusing on contributing to 'the common good' (Moran & Opazo, 2016; Opazo et al., 2018). There are multiple school of thoughts regarding definition of service learning as some scholars explain it in terms activity or practice and experience, whereas, other point it out as Asphalt methodology like away set out and understand it as a learning and teaching processes, a prospective, a process and even an educational offer or a pedagogy (Martínez et al., 2013).

Serrat (2011, p. 280) defined service learning as, "an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single and well-articulated project in which participants are educated while they work on real needs of the community with the aim of improving it". The response and reflection of participating students, faculty, and community members can be a touchstone for the enduring meaning of service-learning in education (Coleman et al., 2017). Service-learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring (Furco, 1996). To explain more, it's a system of practical education in which students are involved in actions that discourse human and community requirements together with organized opportunities deliberately planned to encourage student learning and improvement (Armstrong, 2006).

Types of Service Learning

Service learning is regarded different from other forms of learning in the sense that it is more focused on experiential knowledge in order to benefit both the provider and the recipient of the service. It ensures that both the service and the learning are occurring simultaneously. Some forms of service learning are as examined below:

olunteerism – it is considered as an act of involvement of a volunteer labor, especially in community services. The individuals in such activities usually have an intention of making contacts for possible employment. It is renowned for skill development and promotion of goodness in the quality of human life (Armstrong, 2006).

Internship – it is an opportunity provided to an individual who is either a university student or postgraduate by an employer for a limited period. They are usually provided by the universities to their student in order to get a firsthand experience of the field, where they might spend their rest of life working for. An intern may be paid for their work but the main reason behind an internship is to enhance students' experience and to get them to know their field of work and the ways to handle and sort out the things from other employees and those who are guiding them in their internship (Clifford & Martin, 2011).

Field Education – it is a process of gaining knowledge through field trips. In such a kind of education, students are provided with co-curricular service opportunities. It plays a very important role in many service oriented professional programs such as Social Welfare (Clifford & Martin, 2011).

Advantages of Service Learning:

Among the features of service-learning that make it an appropriate and relevant vehicle for undergraduate education is its emphasis on developing citizenship skills and achieving social change. Service-learning stresses the importance of students' understanding and learning how to intervene on the multiple factors that affect quality of education. Service-learning can be used as a pedagogic modality to enrich and deepen student learning and skill development (Cashman & Seifer, 2008).

According to (Wolff & Tinney, 2006) students develop a real-world experience in connection to the academic subjects they are dealing with. A sense of purpose starts to rise within them, which allows the students to have a deeper understanding about them, enables youth to show empathy and respect to others to gain respect for them.

Furthermore, educational institutions find a deeper connection between what they teach to the students with what exists within the real-world applications. A number of colleges in different regions of the world have regarded Service Learning as an effective drop-out prevention strategy. It broadens the colleges and community relationship in a positive way (Levkoe, Friendly, & Daniere, 2020).

Moreover, in terms of community, the benefits are full of expression. The energy and creativity of the youth is spread out through the community by addressing the needs of the public. The majority of individuals in the process of Service learning had succeeded in creating a positive bond with the community they were engaged in. As this new generation of caring and experienced citizens will be tomorrow's civic leaders (Rinaldo, Davis, & Borunda, 2019).

Service-learning can improve character values and responsible behavior. Students can generalize what they learn from their experiences with service-learning (Moran & Opazo, 2016). They learn how to be respectful towards others and towards public property, and they develop awareness of various life choices. Service-learning can improve academic outcomes for students. Students participating in high-quality service-learning experiences that are meaningful (including interaction with the community, valued service activities, and relevance to students) are able to grasp the benefits of these experiences in terms of development and enhancement of multiple skills among them along with a high level of motivation (Roehlkepartain, 2007).

Disadvantage of Service Learning

Like any other field, service learning is not a process that is perfect within itself. It has got its own drawbacks that may merge when an individual engages in. In this process of learning, primarily six set of stakeholders encounter one another; students, faculty, educational institutions, receivers of service, agencies and the community (Billig, 2019). Each of these stakeholders possesses their own agendas and interest which might cause conflict. Even the process of Service Learning cannot provide a voice to all these sectors. Therefore, it comes to be a major challenge at the developmental stage of service learning to find integrity between the interests and cultures of all the stakeholders (Yang, Anderson, & Burke, 2019).

When students have negative ideas regarding service-learning that may result from community service being mandatory or negative

experience with community service, they are less likely to engage in adequate service and in self-reflection and learning associated with community service (Heuer et al., 2020). In addition, Students may get into trouble on sites because of behavior that may be perceived as inappropriate by individuals at the site even they might find it difficult to identify the exact location where they would have their study (Armstrong, 2006). Furthermore, Students cannot articulate the meaning of their service-learning activities. Students may not know or may not be able to articulate the purpose of participating in service-learning (Huda et al., 2018).

In addition to this, there are several constraints imposed on Service-Learning due to its nature. Whenever, students get involved in a service, they have to follow the schedule given to them by their institutions (Lough & Toms, 2018). Such schedules do not take into consideration the other activities of the student; their safety and liability considerations impact what they do. While in their service activity, student may have little experience at the beginning in order to interact and deal with the issues of community caring. Even though professors are experts in their field of specialization, most of them would not be able to overcome the cross-cultural relationships in the community (Tryon et al., 2008).

The location of some sites geographically distant from the college presents challenges. Issues that need to be addressed and planned for include coursework, transportation, lodging, and needs of students' families. Schools can ask sites that are far away to provide appropriate housing for students. Sites may provide a travel allowance to encourage students to choose their locations in order to decrease the impact of transportation cost and issue on their learning outcomes (Åberg et al., 2009).

Research Methodology

Research Approach

The qualitative research approach was applied in current study which is associated with carrying out a profound evaluation of the subject under consideration (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). A qualitative analysis was used to study and interpret the reflections of the of the students. There are two types of data sources classified by (Zikmund-Fisher, 2013). These include primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources of data involve first-hand data source, from where a researcher or the user of data directly gathers it from the selected participants. On the hand, secondary data is gathered from articles, reports, organisational records, and other sources (Hair, 2015). The primary data source was used in this study, as the researchers collected the data directly from the respondents, in this case, students from the different colleges of United Arab Emirates University. In qualitative research design, primary data is collected through interviews/reflection (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). As reflections are the best way to analyse and to explore about the feeling and thoughts of individuals regarding subject matter particularly in this case the advantages and challenges of the service learning programs and to what extent they influence different skills and learning capabilities of the student. These students were selected during each semester of study duration. A brief description of the reason to conduct the interviews was given to them. They were told that their replies will be kept confidential and will only be used for the current study. The approximate time for each interview was 40 minutes. Total of 25 students agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were qualitatively analysed to explore the challenges and benefits encountered by students, along with their perceptions regarding service learning by using NVivo. As being one of the most

powerful computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo permits researchers to analyse open-ended responses to survey and/or interview questions, as well as other text data like reflective writing, image, and videos. Researcher used reference coding text search query results, word frequency cloud, word tree, dendrogram and hierarchical chart of codes' distribution etc. to analysis the reflections of the respondents.

Results of the Study

Respondents were particularly asked about identifying the advantages of service-learning programs and activities along with challenges associated with those. These open-ended reflections received from the respondents were organized and analyzed by the researcher by using an advance qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11. All the statements given by the students were organized in first step for performing analysis in NVivo 11. Coding was doing in second step and different nodes were developed. In addition, coding references for all the nodes was generated from the software, and the word frequency query was also calculated. After that, the major themes were identified as per coding. Figure 1 represents the references coding and percentage coverage of each code as per reference for the respondent's reflections.

Further, to extract high frequency words, word frequency statistics was performed. Table 1 represents the statistical results. The minimum length of words detected was four and similar words with the same root word were also included in the word frequency query. The top 10 words are: learning with 155 count, service with 106 count, field with 74 count, skills with 70 count, English with 59 count, language with 54 count, students with 50 count, communication with 41 count, time with 40 count, and help with 36 count (see Table 1).

Figure 2 represents the output of the NVivo word frequency query, and it illustrate the 1000 most frequent exact word matches with minimum length of four characters.

Frequency of the words is represented by the font size, with larger font indicating more commonly used words. It is evident from the figure 2 that topmost occurring words includes the learning, service, field, skills, English, language, students, communication, etc. This clearly reflects that as result of service-learning activities students learn various skills and on the top of them are the learning of English language skills in terms of speaking particularly which enhances the student's overall communication skills.

Word tree represents the most occurring words and it can be seen that along with the English language learning, speaking and communication skills there are also other advantages identified by the respondents. i.e. service leaning facilitates students to widen their professional opportunities, widen peer networking, time management, along with having fun.

In addition, to explore the patterns in data; Pearson coefficient was used to develop dendrogram of hierarchal clustering represented in figure4, such type of diagrams is widely used in data mining, machine learning and image pattern recognition. Labeled clades of dendrogram in figure 4 are showing different discovered patterns of challenges faced by the students during service-learning activities which includes Health issues, difficulty of transportations during field visits, and the expenses involved these clusters represents one cluster based on the nature.

Further, it can also be seen that discovered clades of dendrogram are terminating toward the advantages of service learning which are quite similar to word tree and word frequency cloud representing the

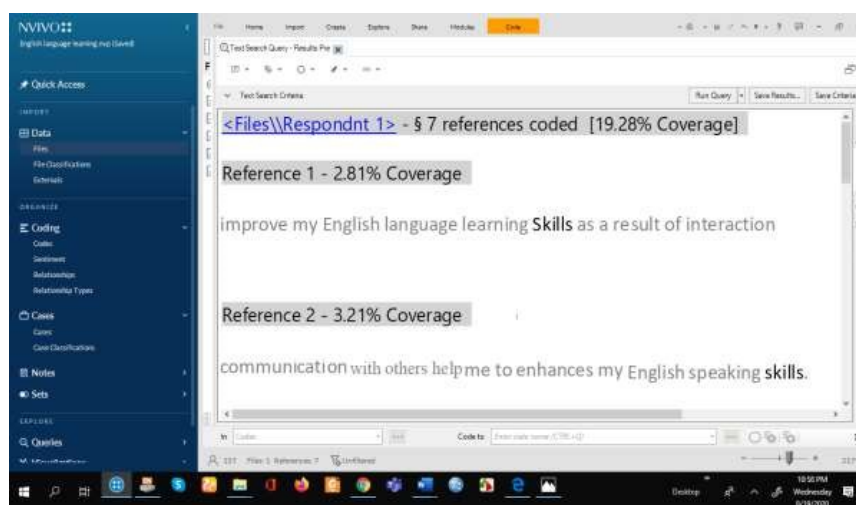


Figure 1. References coding



Figure 2. Word frequency cloud for the 25 included reflections of the students.

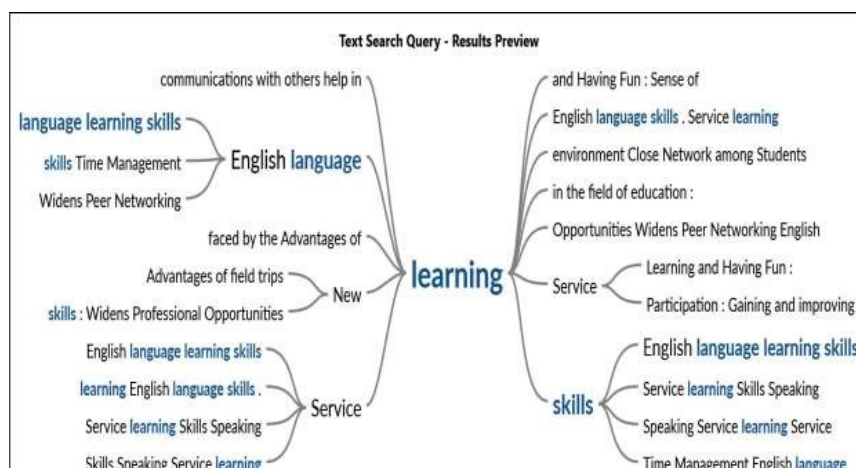


Figure 3. Words Tree

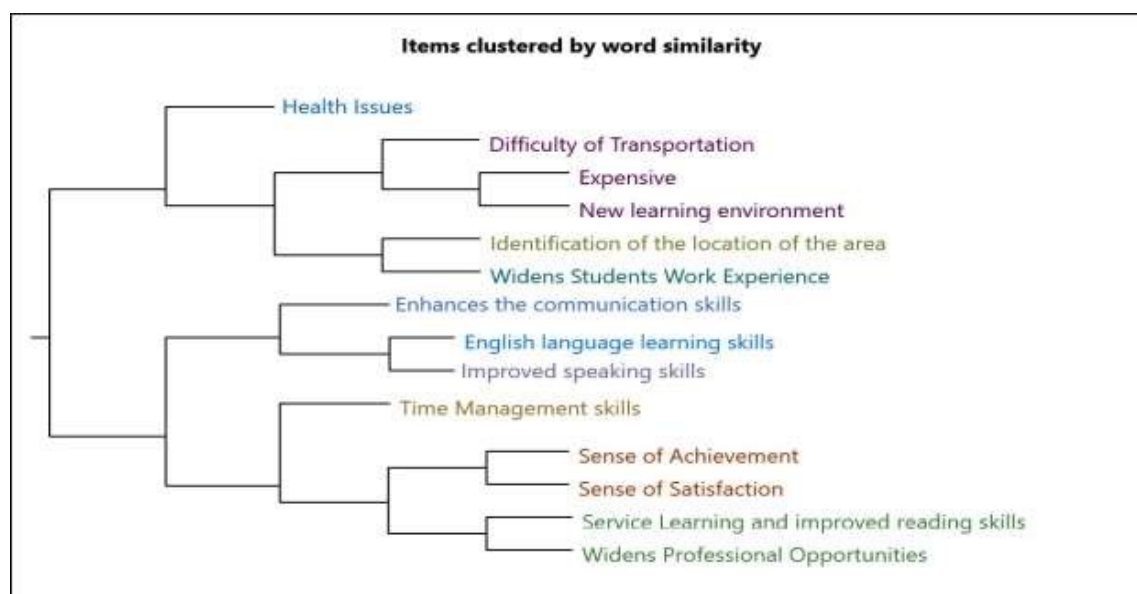


Figure 4. Dendrogram to discover advantages and challenges associated with service learning

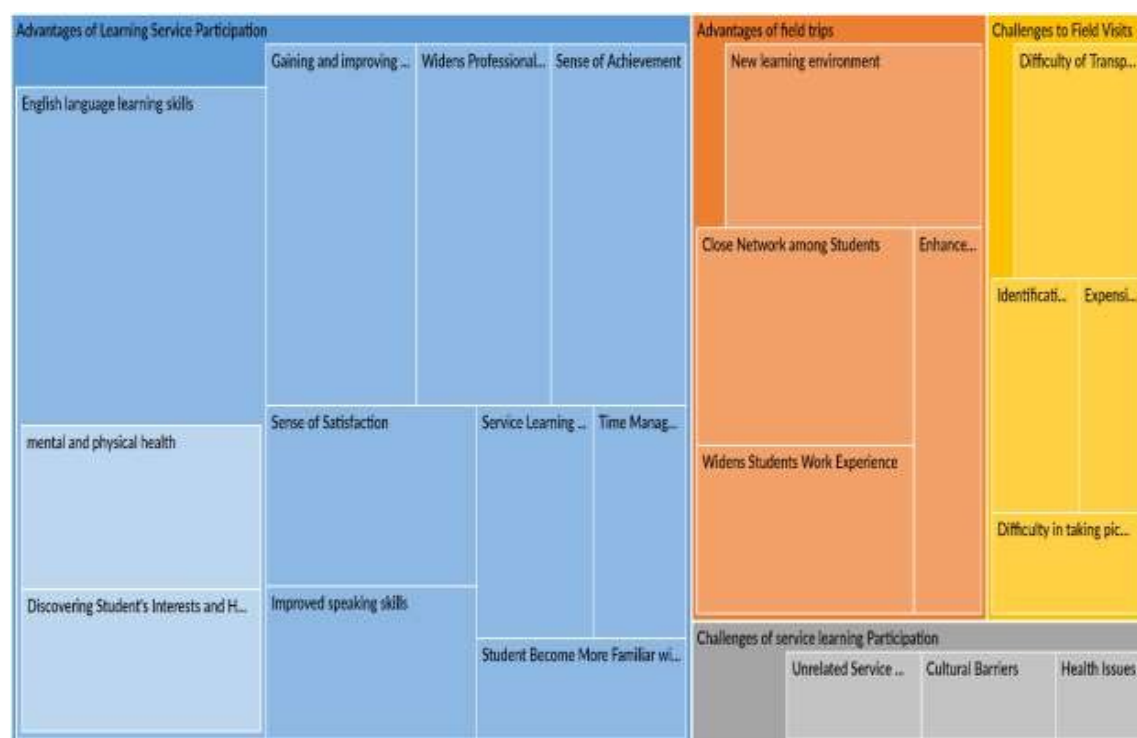


Figure 5. Hierarchical chart of codes' distribution across the corpus.

communication skills, English language learning speaking and reading skills as most prominent advantages in students' reflections. Along with these other important outcomes of service learning includes the sense of achievement and sense of satisfaction among students along with gaining more experience, career growth opportunities and networking with peers etc.

By looking at the nodes comparison by a number of coding references in Fig. 5, it is clearly visible that the 'English language learning skills comes out to be the major theme that emerged after coding views of students regarding service learning activities. Followed by the gaining

and improving communication skills, widens professional networks, mental and physical health, sense of satisfaction, time management skills, discovering students' interests, improving speaking skills and enhanced students' familiarity with volunteering work, new learning environment, closer networks among students, wines students work experience etc.

Along with above mentioned benefits some disadvantages linked with service learning are also identified i.e. difficulty in transportation, high cost, difficulty in taking pictures, health issues, unrelated service learning and cultural barriers etc.

Table 1. Statistical table of high-frequency keywords

Word	Weighted Percentage (%)	Count
learning	4.84	155
service	3.31	106
field	2.31	74
skills	2.18	70
English	1.84	59
Language	1.68	54
Students	1.56	50
communication	1.28	41
Time	1.25	40
help	1.12	36
experience	1.03	33
speaking	0.9	29
different	0.9	29
community	0.87	28
speaking	0.87	28
also	0.84	27
people	0.84	27
work	0.81	26
trip	0.75	24
life	0.72	23
many	0.62	20
sense	0.62	20
activities	0.59	19
trips	0.59	19
others	0.53	17
place	0.53	17
way	0.53	17
satisfaction	0.5	16
challenges	0.47	15
commented	0.47	15
volunteer	0.47	15
get	0.44	14
places	0.44	14
advantages	0.41	13

Discussion and Propositions for Future Research

Advantages of service learning

The first question asked from the respondents was *What are the advantages of service- learning participation and which important skills you learn from service-learning participation?* When we had interviews with the students in UAE university on both sides, males and females, we found these points:

There are many student who agree that Service Learning helps them to learn multiple skills as they meet new people and can get experience from their backgrounds so this is an excellent way to develop the student's skills, most prominent of those are the communication skills, English language learning skills, speaking and reading skills, time management skills and social skills etc.

Along with that most of the students find that the service learning is very important because it gives them a chance to change a lot of lives and plays an important role to motivate student achievement. Along with that increasing the self-confidence one of the mainly reason for why the students participate in the learning services. In addition, there are students suffering from the study stress, so some of the UAEU students found that the service learning helps them to reduce it and they can be

better because they can escape from the daily schedule and makes them to feel a sense of achievement after service leaning participation.

Some of the students believe that the service leaning is a great way which opens to them the new learning environment and they can visit new places as well which further open career opportunities for them and a sense of satisfaction arise in them which results into a positive attitude and they can perform better. Some students also reported that service-learning participation positively affect their physical and mental health resulting into their good performance in academic matters. Also, students reported that service-learning participation results in development widening of professional networks and peer networking among the students which can be beneficial for them in longer terms.

It can be said that service learning is not only a one-handed beneficial program rather it is focused on benefiting all the corners that surround it. Students gain academic knowledge and skills especially they learn English as a foreign language with an increase in self-confidence, satisfaction ultimately resulting to a sense of achievement. It can also enhance the faculty members' quality of teaching, allows them to find opportunities for research and outlets for professional expertise. It develops a kind of commitment for the public service (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993).

Therefore, for future researchers it is proposed to empirically investigate the following associations in detail.

Proposition 1: Service-learning participation is positively associated with the development and enhancement of multiple academic (communication skills, English as a foreign language learning skills, speaking skills, and reading skills) as well as nonacademic skills i.e. Time management, social skills among the students.

Proposition 2: Service-learning participation is positively associated with the development and enhancement of sense of achievement and sense of satisfaction among the students along with the availability of the career opportunities to them.

Proposition 3: Service-learning participation is positively associated with the physical and mental health of the students.

Proposition 4: Service-learning participation is positively associated with the in b

Challenges Related to Service-Learning Participation

The second question asked from the respondents was *“What are the challenges of service- learning participation?”* The major findings related to this research question revealed that:

Transportation is one challenges that was reported by many students as most of the time they are unable to participate in service learning activities because many of them live at far places and they do not have their own conveyance to travel. In addition, many reported that it is costly for them to participate in service learning based on the requirement of “traveling and residence” expenses therefore, which they cannot afford.

On the other hand some of the students reported that while service learning participation when they are not properly briefed about the locations than they face issue of identification of the place related to their major which causes inconvenience and reduce the impact of overall significance of the service learning participation. Another challenge identified during this research was that a lot of students do not have enough experience or information about learning service and how they can participate in it.

Furthermore, when students travel during field trips for service learning they also encounter culture barriers along with communication issues due to less familiarities with foreign languages. As when they meet with new people, they find it difficult to communicate with them because different of minds and different needs are difficult to communicate. Students also reported the difficulty faced by them while taking photos due to the restrictions applied in different places depending upon the codes of ethics and other issue.

Proposition 5: Service-learning participation is negatively associated with the transportation and other costs involved for such participation along with the identification of the place in accordance with the majors of the students.

Proposition 6: Service-learning participation is negatively associated with the lack of students' experience and information about the Service-learning participation.

Proposition 7: Service-learning participation is negatively associated with cultural barriers and communication due to less familiarity the foreign languages.

Proposition 8: Service-learning participation is negatively associated with the restrictions regarding photography and other necessary details required by them to complete their projects.

Implications and Recommendations

Service learning turns out to be a great way for transforming the way of teaching and learning. It has provided several quality programs for youth to the society to work with them to develop and enhance multiple skills ultimately improving the standard of living in the community. However, if it is managed by a poor management and/or institution it may prove to be the entire opposite of what it is meant for. But the answer to issue is not to prohibit Service Learning, rather than finding ways to overcome those obstacles that are blocking its way to success. It could be possible by designing certain structures for the institutions and private or governmental agencies that would enable them to meet each other's interests and way of working.

On the whole service learning primarily involves different sets of participants contributing towards the benefit of the community. Each of these stakeholders possesses their own agendas and interest that might cause conflicts. Therefore, it is a major challenge at the beginning of service learning to integrate the interests and cultures of all the individuals involved. It should be carried out in such a way that everyone meets their interests and the goals of the service learning will be achieved for both the participants and the community.

The students should engage in this form of learning only if it enables them to learn certain abilities that will benefit them in their career fields especially the language learning which is important for communication in their entire carrier. Some students might develop negative thoughts due to lack of knowledge of the places where they are going to provide services. Location might appear to be one such problem. Some students might not easily identify the location for their service learning. In this case, those in charge should provide as much information as possible and clear directions. Such locations should also only be selected when there is high chance of students gaining in experience from their placement, otherwise they should not be chosen.

One of the major areas that require focus should be to overcome the communication barriers while meeting with different people so that the point of view of others can be understood and actions can be taken accordingly. For this institution need to invest in language learning programs designed for improvement of listening, speaking,

reading, and writing skills among students. In addition, the restrictions of photography are an important issue to be addressed as photography and other necessary details that students might be required for their work in which they might be engaged is important to be provided to them. Students should be assisted to be enabled to take photographs and videos of the areas that they are working in with required permissions. In such cases the general restrictions of the organizations should be removed for the students on service learning. This will enable students to achieve as much knowledge and experience from the process of services learning and to improve their motivation to engage in it.

Limitations of the study and Future Research

Along with the strengths of the study there are some limitations which future researchers can work to overcome. For example, we could not have enough students to present the interview question on both males and females; most students were on vacation and only few responded to our request. Growing the sample size of the applicants for the interview is required for future researchers to have more better insight about their views, perceptions, and believes. Current study is established on qualitative methodology in which we look mostly in terms of the interviews and analysis using modern statistical tools whereas, in futures researchers can adopt a mixed method approach including qualitative as well as quantitative survey to explore and empirically test the derived benefits of and service associated with service learning participation.

Furthermore, in future research, there is a need to assess if some practices may be more important than others, and how the presence of multiple practices interacts with participant and other program characteristics to influence different outcomes. Moreover, reflection was the only recommended practice to be included in at least half of the studies, which suggests that current SL programs might be overlooking the potential importance of many recommended elements. Students' reelections were the only sample in this research; in future the instructors can be included as well to know about their viewpoint. Tutors preview will not be the same as students, because they have dissimilar minds and views.

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