



SERVICE-LEARNING: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Purpose: Service-learning is a method of learning through experience that takes learners outside of the classroom to encourage them in their study and help them build societal understanding and abilities. In which a learner studies concepts in the classroom while also volunteering with an organisation and participating in reflection exercises to increase their comprehension of what is being taught. Service-learning is highly relevant in the present scenario as it improves students' performance, academic learning outcomes, commitment to serve the society, ethical development, management skill and interpersonal competencies, all while benefiting society.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Descriptive Research was used in this study, which is focused on secondary data sources. Secondary data is gathered through books, newspapers, journals, articles, and government websites.

Findings: According to a thorough examination of the review of literature, service learning has long been seen as an essential technique of learning through experience that improves learners' efficiency while helping society. It has numerous new prospects as well as difficulties, which are explained in the paper.

Originality/Value: The significance of the current study rests in the fact that service learning contributes to both the learner and society at the same time. Further advances in this area may result in further improvements and benefits for both the student and the community on a higher plane.

Keywords: Service learning, students, educators, opportunities, challenges

Introduction

An adequate education enables a person to obtain knowledge and improve their overall standard of life. This education is not necessarily limited to just textbook study. Even beyond educational institutions, the world is a classroom studded with valuable lessons and life experiences. Service learning is One of the most important aspects of these educational approaches. Service-learning is a method of learning through experience that takes learners outside of the classroom to encourage them in their study and help them build societal understanding and abilities. In which a learner studies concepts in the classroom while also volunteering with an organisation and participating in reflection exercises to increase their comprehension of what is being taught.

Objectives

1. To identify the opportunities of services learning
2. To identify the challenges of services learning



Definition for service learning

According to Bringle and Hatcher, service-learning is an educational programme or based on competencies, credit-bearing learning opportunity where students (a) engage in mutually agreed-upon service practises that advantage society, and (b) portray on the community service activity in order to acquire a greater comprehension of course material, an expanded understanding of the discipline, and a strengthened awareness of individual principles and responsibilities as citizens. Service-learning blends service alongside educational goals with the goal of changing both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is achieved by integrating service work with organised chances for reflection on oneself, discovery of oneself, and the learning and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content [1]. Service learning is a grounded in research teaching method that applies directed or classroom learning by means of activity to address an authentic community need in a process that allows for young people effort while offering organised space for representation on experiences in service and demonstration of gained abilities and expertise. Students enrolled in service-learning courses work together with regional, national, and international a charitable organisation and governmental organisations to deepen their understanding and application of course content by addressing a genuine, community-identified problem [2].

History of Service Learning

Service learning can be established back to the early nineteenth century, when educational reformers such as Horace Mann and John Dewey promoted the concept of experiential learning. Service-learning programmes first appeared at higher education institutions in the early twentieth century, however they were not widely adopted until the 1960s and 1970s. As a professor at the Southern Regional Education Board, Robert Sigmon initially used the term "service learning" in 1967. The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse was founded in 1993, and the Corporation for National and Community Service was founded in 1994[3]. These organisations aided in the promotion of service learning and the provision of assistance to instructors.

The origins of service learning in India can be found in the early 20th century, when social reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and others started to advocate for social work as a means of addressing the needs of the underprivileged and marginalised. Service-learning programmes started at colleges and universities in the 1950s and 1960s, but they were not widely used until the 1980s and 1990s. The National Service Scheme (NSS) was introduced by the Indian government in 1984. Students have the chance to take advantage of volunteer opportunities through the NSS, a volunteer service programme, which is one of the biggest service-learning programmes in the world with more than 3 million student volunteers [4].

In the resent scenario Service learning is becoming a generally recognized educational practise. It has been estimated that about 3 million college students participate in service learning each year. Service learning is also being utilised by elementary to secondary schools, and there is a rising movement to promote service learning in the workplace's world widely [5].

Service-learning different from community service

Many people confuse the phrases service-learning and community service, even though they share an outline but are extremely different in numerous respects. People become perplexed when the term "learning" is employed. Service learning is a type of educational programme that combines community service with academic study. The primary objective of service learning is to help students learn and grow while also addressing community issues. In contrast, community service is merely the



practise of delivering voluntary assistance to a community or its individuals. It does not always include an instructional element [6].

Service learning is purposefully designed to connect students' learning with community needs. This means that the service activity is carefully chosen to be related to the students' academic education, and there is a clear plan for how the students will reflect on their service experience and apply what they have learned. Community service, on the other hand, may or may not be planned. It is possible to perform community service without wanting to do so. A crucial part of service learning is reflection. It is encouraged for students to think back on their service experience both during and after it. It supports students in synthesising their experiences, identifying their lessons learnt, and applying those lessons to their courses and daily lives. Contrarily, introspection is not always a part of community service. The results of service learning tend to be simultaneously societal and academic. On the other hand, community service may or may not have particular result [7] [8].

Process of Service Learning

Service learning is a type of education that blends community service and academic study. It is intended to involve learners in practical, hands-on activities that address genuine community problems in addition simultaneously enhancing academic knowledge and boosting individual development. A proper service-learning strategy is essential to ensure that the course aligns with the goals of the school or organisation. The process should clearly identify the learning objectives of the students as well as the community impact goals. This will help to ensure that the programme is fruitful and beneficial to both parties included. The following constitute typical steps in the service-learning process.

Stage One: Preparation

All projects begin with some kind of planning. Students and instructors can collaborate to identify a particular community's requirement, explore it more thoroughly, and devise a strategy of action. The primary purpose of this phase is to figure out a need and develop a strategy to address that need. You can accomplish this by discussing with your students, speaking with people of the community, or carrying out research [9].

Stage Two: Implementation/ Performing the Service

The following phase is to act and carry out your service encounter. During this level, pupils actively participate in the volunteering activity. They collaborate with people of the community or organisations to meet the specified requirements. Direct assistance, such as tutoring, constructing houses, or organising events, may be provided, as may indirect assistance, and such as investigation, representation, or analysis of data. Students are continually learning and creating relationships with others in society during the action stage. All over the project, students will start asking questions that will result in further understanding and discoveries that they will not be able to understand in the classroom setting. The action stage is critical for ensuring students identify sources and understand how they can utilise them. The purpose is to prepare students for managing a service-learning project in successful and innovative methods. This will eventually provide them with a better insight of the individuals who live in their neighbourhood [10].

Stage Three: Reflection

The following stage is assessing your service feedback. Learners should explore how their encounters, abilities, and knowledge connect to their personal life across the process of reflection. The idea is for students to draw links within their private lives and what they have experienced, and then to apply the



information they gained to improve the society. It can be challenging to offer value to specific topics for kids while educating in the educational setting. Learners, on the other hand, can think about how they may make an impact in the world around them when engaging in service-learning. This could be journaling, drafting a paper, or taking advantage of a group discussion. Reflection assists you in making sense of what you have done, identifying the lessons you have gained from it, and applying what you have acquire [11].

Stage Four: Demonstration

The last stage of service-learning is demonstration. This is the phase in which students can show all that they have gained and accomplished throughout their involvements in the community. In this phase, they can conduct displays, be advocates for change, and take additional action in order to make a difference. Through the demonstration process, students can educate others and exemplify to themselves what they learned. In completing a service-learning project, it is also important to celebrate the achievements of students. The teacher should organize a way to recognize students in the community for all their efforts. This is especially important because students need to know people understand and appreciate their contributions [12].

Different Categories of Service Learning

Depending on the purpose of the activity and the corresponding learning goals, service learning tends to be divided into several areas. Following are a few typical types of service learning.

1. Direct service-learning

Learners participating in this sort of service learning interact communicate directly with people or organisations in the wider society. Direct service-learning programmes include educating kids, visiting aged care facilities, and helping with refugees.

2. Indirect service-learning

Learners in this sort of service learning engage on initiatives that help the community but do not entail direct touch with people. The act of fundraising, investigation, and preparing policy memos are a few examples of indirect service-learning initiatives.

3. Advocacy-based service-learning

Participants in this sort of service learning strive to spread information regarding or promote for a specific topic. Demonstrations, letters to political officials, and empowering the general population about a problem are all examples of advocacy-based service-learning initiatives.

4. Research based service-learning

Learners in this kind of service learning do research to discover a community concern. Interviewing people in the community, collecting information, and analysing patterns are all examples of research-based service-learning programmes.

5. Experiential based service-learning

Learners in this kind of service learning acquire practical expertise in a certain profession. Internships, training programmes, and work shadowing are examples of experiential learning initiatives.

All of these are only a handful of the numerous types of service learning that exist. A student's involvement in service learning will depend on their passions, their abilities, and requirements of their community. The following additional criteria also can be used to classify service learning: Service-learning projects can need a time commitment of only a few minutes up to several months. Location-based Service-learning projects can be carried out in a range of contexts, which includes educational institutions, non-profit groups, and governmental organisations. Another type is partnership-based



service-learning initiatives, which frequently entail collaborations among educational institutions and non-profits in the community. A different kind of service-learning projects is reflection, which gives learners the chance to consider what they have learned [13] [14].

Challenges and opportunities of service learning

Holland explains, the punctuation mark is the key to service-learning. It is the enhancement of learning objectives through organised volunteer activities aimed at addressing demands and possibilities recognised by community circles. A participatory pedagogy like service-learning necessitates the formation of solid collaborative connections [15]. Robert Sigmon described service-learning as a hands-on educational strategy based on "reciprocal learning" (Sigmon, 1979). According to his argument, both those who provide service and those who benefit from service "learn" from the experience because knowledge comes from service activities. According to Sigmon, service-learning only takes place when simultaneously the service givers and the beneficiaries get something from the activity. The implementation and utilisation of guided reflection to make connections for students between their community experience, classroom learning, and how they will grow as active, engaged citizens distinguishes service-learning from other kinds of hands-on education [16].

As a pedagogical strategy that blends academic learning with community engagement, service learning has achieved wide acceptance. This academic introduction seeks to give a general overview of the difficulties and possibilities related to service learning. We can learn a lot about this educational methodology's capacity to promote individual, intellectual, and societal progress by looking at how multidimensional it is. In order to provide a thorough awareness of the challenges involved and to direct future research and implementation efforts, this study examines both the advantages and challenges that are faced in service-learning programmes. Through meaningful community engagement, service learning, which is founded on the ideas of experiential education, provides students with a singular opportunity to connect theory and practise. By giving students the chance to apply their academic knowledge and skills to real-world scenarios, this approach goes beyond typical classroom training. A variety of fields now provide thriving service-learning programmes that emphasise the connection between learning and social effect. While there are many benefits to this pedagogical method, there are also some issues that must be resolved if it is to be as effective and long-lasting as possible.

The Advantages of Service Learning

According to studies, service-learning is an effective approach on college and university campuses. Regarding research, service-learning has positive effects on academic, social, and cultural characteristics. (Butin, 2006). It subsequently enhances curriculum comprehension and dimension, boosts knowledge and understanding of social concerns, and raises awareness as well as acceptance of heterogeneity of society [17].

Service involvement has a significant positive impact on academic achievement including GPA, writing skill, problem-solving skill, commitment to social action and racial awareness promotion, self-worth, leadership skills, interpersonal skills as well as intra personal skills, selecting a service career, and strategies to continue serving the community after college [18]

Academical benefits of service learning

Service learning helps students integrate their school- acquired skills and knowledge to real-life environment. This utilisation assists learners in comprehending the significance of their academic



lessons, hence improving their entire educational experience. They gain a deeper comprehension of the material and are better able to relate abstract ideas to real-world situations thanks to this practical approach. Oftentimes, service-learning initiatives call for students to assess complex community issues, identify problems, and provide creative solutions. The fostering of critical thinking and problem-solving skills through this strategy allows students to tackle challenges through a variety of angles. By involving participants in hands-on engagement with diverse populations and communities promotes empathy, understanding, and respect for others. Students learn about various cultures, viewpoints, and societal issues, which helps them to become more culturally competent. Students gain vital interpersonal skills, improve their ability to communicate, and learn how to collaborate well in groups through such joint endeavours [19] [20].

Cooperation with local organisations, nonprofits, and experts from other professions is common. Through this involvement, students' professional growth and employment chances may be improved. It may also result in networking opportunities and exposure to potential career options. The possibility that learners will talk about their experiences with one another along with getting emotional assistance from teachers and more probable to result in these kinds of student-to-student conversations.

Personal and Social Benefits for Students

Students have opportunities for personal growth through service learning. Learners can increase their sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and confidence by participating in meaningful volunteer projects [21]. They have a sense of fulfilment and purpose when they have a good effect on the people they serve. Learners gain a deeper grasp of social concerns and an increase in empathy through direct interaction with people or communities that are struggling. They develop understanding of the feelings and viewpoints of others, dispelling prejudices and developing kindness. A more open and accepting community is encouraged by this increased empathy [22]. Civic Engagement, Students who participate in service learning are better able to understand their responsibility as engaged citizens as compared to those who are attending service learning. Students understand the value of civic involvement and cultivate a feeling of duty to others by meeting the requirements of those around them and trying to bring about changes in society. This encourages a dedication to changing society for the better [23].

Service learning also encourage students to be creative and imaginative through real life experiences, which can result in original concepts and solutions to issues. Service-learning opportunities can offer priceless skills and knowledge that can be applied in the job. Candidates that exhibit a great sense of empathy, ethical behaviour, and community involvement are frequently highly valued by employers. Additionally, service learning can assist students in exploring various career options, gaining practical knowledge, and honing crucial abilities like teamwork, communication, and management. Additionally, educate people about various cultures and viewpoints to help advance peace and tolerance and also helps to get a good insight about self-care and well being

Community Impact of service learning

Numerous impacts exist for service learning to affect communities significantly and positively. Real-world community needs are considered in service-learning projects. Students can help the community by participating in service projects that address issues and urgent needs. This can involve helping poor people and communities, contributing to environmental conservation initiatives, enhancing educational opportunities, or supporting neighbourhood nonprofits and local businesses. The alliances encourage community members and educational institutions to work together and support one another. Students, teachers, and community members can forge enduring bonds and foster a deeper sense of community



through cooperating. By integrating people directly in the projects, community members can be also empowered by service learning and acquire leadership skills, self-confidence, and a greater sense of involvement with civic affairs. This collaborative activity also aids in raising awareness about community issues and service-learning initiatives increase public awareness of socioeconomic problems and challenges that societies suffer.

Institutional Advantages of service learning

The benefits of service learning extend beyond students and community, the institute also get benefited from service learning. Through the integration of theory and practical experiences, service learning enables students to put their knowledge and abilities to use in real-world situations. This practical method improves learning outcomes by encouraging reflective learning. It aids students in developing a deeper comprehension of the subject matter and hence the overall learning Outcomes institute's Improved [24].

Effective collaborations between educational institutions and the community are fostered by service learning. This cooperative strategy enhances the institution's relationships to the neighbourhood and builds a solid reputation. By promoting the activities through various marketing channels, highlighting the institution's effect on society, and luring potential students, service learning is also beneficial in helping the college build a positive public image and marketing strategy. commitment to teaching. Institutions can also demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards and raise their profile in the higher education market by incorporating service learning into their courses. Service learning can stimulate instructor and learner research and scholarship possibilities [25].

Institutions can investigate the effects of service learning on educational success, community improvement, and social transformation. This study adds to the body of knowledge in several fields and demonstrates the institution's dedication to advancing scholarly research work with practical applications.

Over all, Service learning provides a comprehensive educational experience that integrates academic learning with community engagement. It develops vital abilities, information, and principles that help learners both individually and intellectually while preparing them to be involved, functioning, and accountable members of their surrounding societies.

Challenges of service learning

Service learning is a type of educational programme that blends academic study with helping the community. While it has various advantages, there are also difficulties in setting up and overseeing service-learning programmes. Here are some of the difficulties associated with service learning.

Handling the time demands of service learning, which calls for learners to find ways to combine their academic workload with service commitments, is one of the main problems. When students have several courses of study and tasks to finish, this can be especially difficult. Setting up a suitable time for the community as a whole or a particular segment is another task [26].

A fundamental problem in service learning is balancing academic rigour with service goals. In order to ensure that students complete academic requirements while addressing community needs, it is crucial to establish curriculum that seamlessly include community service. It can be challenging to strike the



right equilibrium among theoretical ideas and real-world applications; this calls for careful planning and collaboration among educators, community partners, and students.

In recognition of service learning to be effective, societal partnership is crucial. Developing and sustaining solid relationships with community partners is challenging. Every community has its own unique characteristics, thus it might be difficult for students, especially those who have not done much social exploration, to comprehend these characteristics and act accordingly. Finding suitable collaborators, settling expectations, and resolving power disparities between the institution and the community can prove difficult, though [27].

In some cases, it might be difficult to get students to reflect on their community service activities and integrate them into their academic learning. Making linkages between learners' service work and the subject matter requires careful guidance and assistance of their instructors. One another threat is the time consume to coordinate service placements, transportation, and scheduling for students and community partners. It can be difficult to ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page and that resources are being used properly.

When we make this much planning and preparation, students and community members alike have high expectations, but we cannot expect to satisfy those expectations all the time.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, unexpected threats may prevent the programme from being as successful as we had hoped.

One of the most difficult aspects of service learning is dealing with ethical concerns. Service learning presents ethical concerns about power dynamics, cultural sensitivity, and the possibility of unintended consequences. Engaging with marginalised populations needs significant thinking and planning to ensure that service programmes are respectful, empowering, and culturally appropriate. To guide students' behaviour and foster responsible participation in the community, ethical principles and reflection procedures should be integrated into service-learning projects [28].

Service-learning ought to attempt to have a lasting effect on students as well as the community. It is difficult to ensure the long-term viability of service initiatives beyond the period of a course or academic programme. To ensure that the benefits of service learning endure after the immediate experience, rigorous planning, involvement in the community, and an emphasis on strengthening capacity are required.

Successful service learning depends on creating long-lasting collaborations between educational institutions and community organisations. However, because of disparities in objectives, facilities, and goals, developing these relationships can be difficult. To guarantee an equitable relationship that fosters significant involvement in the community, it is necessary to maintain open lines of communication, mutual trust, and shared goals.

After each educational programme, we must evaluate the student's growth. It might be difficult to gauge the effectiveness of service learning and its effects. It is essential to provide adequate assessment tools and procedures to rate educational and community outcomes in order to show the success of service-learning programmes and guide their growth in the future.



A well-established collaboration and communication between teachers, pupils, community organisations, and other partners must continue in order to address these difficulties. Service learning may be improved and reinforced to better meet these challenges, maximising the opportunity for life-changing learning opportunities and beneficial social effect[29].

Discussion and conclusion

Service learning is an approach of education that integrates academic learning with community service to encourage civic involvement and advance students' social and personal growth. Throughout the paper, various challenges and opportunities related to service learning have been discussed, reflected light on the potential advantages and difficulties that educators, students, and communities involved in service-learning programmes may encounter. The advantages of service learning, such as possibilities for personal and social growth, knowledge application, community impact, and increased participation, underline how important it is to incorporate service learning into educational curriculum. Service learning presents a variety of opportunities and problems for educators, students, and communities, just like any other educational institution. Even though there are difficulties with time management, community involvement, reflection, and sustainability, these difficulties can be overcome with good planning, cooperation, and support systems. Most of the practical difficulties may be handled by careful planning, getting ready, getting the right feedback from students and community partners, and motivating and educating students and community members to get excited about the procedure.

Education professionals and institutions need to invest on infrastructure, resources, and training in order to effectively utilize the benefits of service learning. Furthermore, for service-learning programmes to be sustainable and effective, cooperation between educational institutions, community organizations, and policymakers is essential. Service learning may help students develop holistically, empower communities, and promote a culture of civic involvement and social responsibility by overcoming obstacles and seizing opportunities.

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