

A Glance on Service-Learning Project at Dagon University: Teaching English at No. (11) Basic Education Post-Primary School in Dagon Myothit (East), Yangon, Myanmar

Cho Ei Maung¹, Khin Thundar Myat¹ and Aye Aye Tun²

Abstract

This paper deals with a Service-Learning program organized by Dagon University in which 16 English major specialization students made their contributions to a post-primary school situated in East Dagon Township. The main purposes of this paper are (i) to explore how Service-Learning is related to becoming better citizens for students and (ii) to investigate in which ways they become different in themselves after participating in Service-Learning activity.

Key words: service-learning; experiential learning

Introduction

It has been recognized for long that learning cannot be separated from experience. Learning can only occur when the learner makes sense of new experiences and incorporates them into a broader conceptual framework. Increasingly, educators in higher education regard experiential learning as an essential component in university curricula attuned to various challenges facing higher education today. Dagon University realized the importance of civic society in maintaining a democratic and harmonious society in accords with its vision. As a result of being under the rule of regime government over 50 years, Myanmar has suffered so many defeats especially in Education Sector. The vast majority of students pursuing undergraduate degrees today seem blissfully unaware of the problems that surround them on their campuses and in their communities. This could be envisaged as a serious impact on society when we are thinking about DU which produces almost five thousand graduates to real-world annually without well equipping its students with civic skills, community engagement and good moral. Indeed, universities should be key pillars supporting a nation's economic, social and industrial transformation especially at a time of democratic reform. However, Myanmar's Universities in these times are under pressure to reform and change in a highly complex political environment. Curriculum reform is an issue that also needs to be addressed urgently. The current curriculum is so overloaded with factual information that it leads itself to rote learning. Classroom practices also do not allow for analytical, creative thinking or free discussion and expression of thought. In these entire curricula, there is no special concern for experiential learning. Due to the adopted fixed curricular system of Myanmar's institutions, inclusion of a new service-learning course in curricula of undergraduate studies has some limitations. However, we can build a service-learning component in an approved curriculum. Anyway, to develop a curriculum for service-learning is a new term and an untested concept in Myanmar Arts and Science Universities. For this, an introductory sustainability service-learning course should be developed so as to expose students to community dialogues while simultaneously teaching effective communication skills. Due to above mentioned facts, Dagon University as an arts and science university takes up the challenges for higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal; and higher education also needs to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities. Liberally educated students must be taught to analyze problems, evaluate data, critically appraise arguments and beliefs and, most importantly, weigh alternatives.

¹ Tutor, Department of English, Dagon University

² Pro-Rector, Dagon University

According to the Education For All: Global Monitoring Report 2005– The Quality Imperative (EFA:GMR), quality education focuses on two things; learners’ cognitive development and promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development. Universities all over the world are trying to be able to provide the students quality education, which is much more than only giving the knowledge of subject matter.

Dagon University is also one of the universities that is trying to be able to provide quality education to the students. To achieve the purpose, Dagon University has been implementing Service-Learning program since early 2014. Dagon University has also sent faculty from different departments to attend work-shop, conference and training abroad to understand the concept of Service-Learning more clearly in order to be able to able to implement more effectively, by the sponsorship of the United Board for Christian Higher Education Asia. With the knowledge and insights gained from them, Dagon University keeps doing Service-Learning activities locally as well as collaborating with foreign universities.

Action Profile

This is one of the activities of Service-Learning program that implemented at a primary school in East Dagon Township, named No (11) Basic Education Post-primary School. In this activity, 16 English major specialization students participated as service learners for 40 hours, four hours a day in November, 2015 (See Appendix A). Dagon University provided transportation and meals and other teaching aids to the service learners for the whole program through the grant awarded by the United Board.

In this program, 16 students participated and who are interested and enthusiastic in social activities were selected and let them understand the term “Service- Learning”, which is different from volunteering or doing social activities which they used to do. Before going to the community, they discussed and prepared the lessons which can be suitable for the students’ level and the duration they can take to teach the students under the supervision of Ms. Cho Ei Maung, a tutor from English Department, Dagon University, who has acted as a facilitator for this Service-Learning activity.

During the activity, service-learners made their contributions to the community; teaching English to the students using video clips and songs and playing with them. They made their contributions to the school by teaching English to Grade II and IV students using video-clips, songs and games. Each and every participant took main teacher role one time during the activity while others were serving as assistants. They had met, discussed and prepared the lessons one month before the activity.

Related Literature Review

According to John Glenn, Chair, National Commission on Service-Learning, Service-Learning is powerful strategy for teaching and learning, which allows young people to deepen and demonstrate their learning and at the same time develop a strong sense of civic responsibility. It is also regarded that Service-Learning is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teaching civic responsibility, and strength communities. It helps the students become better students as well as citizens who understand civic responsibilities to the community, can apply the knowledge they gain from their education effectively for the community and learn from serving to the community.

According to Frank Newman, visiting professor, Brown University, Service-Learning involves students in solving community problems, and at the same time, helps them learn and apply reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

Service-Learning can help all young people share their strengths, whatever they are, and make a real contribution to the community they live (Buffy Sainte-Marie, founder, Nihewan Foundation).

Students who participate in Service-Learning are likely to continue to work all their lives in many different ways to improve the world around them, with lasting benefits for our country and our planet (Senator Edward M. Kennedy).

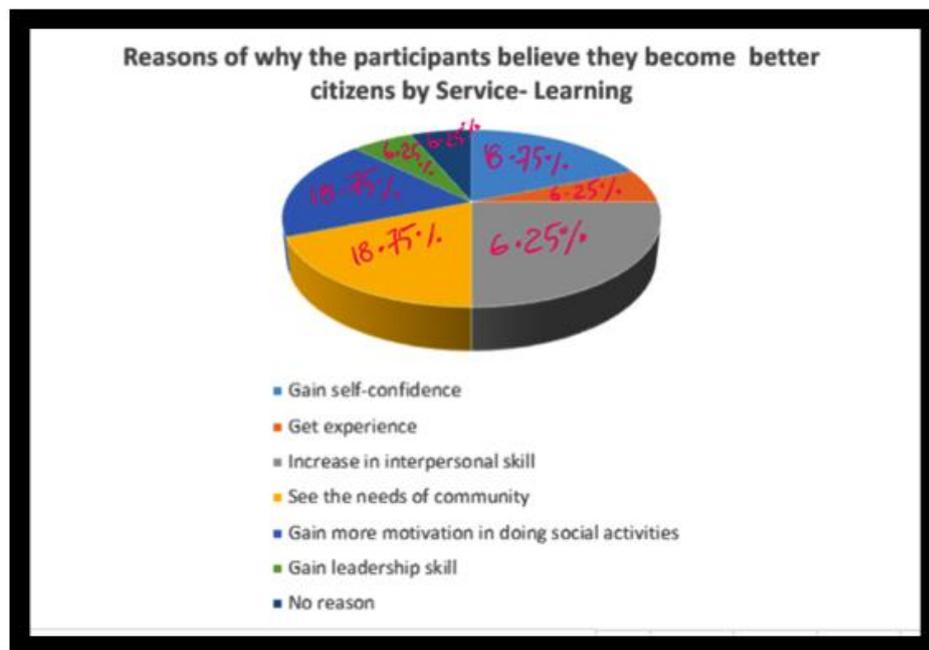
Well-designed service-learning that contributes to academic achievement can strengthen schools and communities and prepare young people for a lifetime of good citizenship. (Sandra Feldman, President, National School Board Association).

Method

Questionnaires are used to collect data from the students concerning their opinions on Service-Learning, its impacts on their learning and lives, their feelings, problems encountered during the activity and things they have got from the activity (see Appendix B). While they were doing the activity, observations and reflection sessions were made to see their performances and to be able to give them feedback concerning the activities they did, problems or difficulties or challenges they encountered.

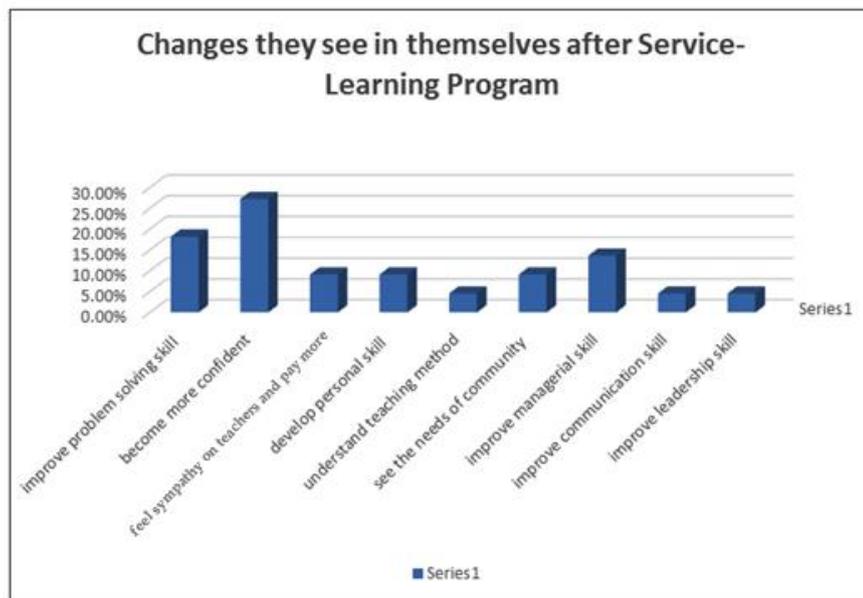
Findings and Discussions

Concerning the first research questions, it is found out that all students believe that Service-Learning activities can make them better citizens and become more motivated in doing the activities helpful to the community. However, they have different reasons in believing so. 25% of the participants reported that they noticed their interpersonal skill increased because of the program, the other three reasons— seeing the needs of the community more than before, gaining self-confidence and motivation in doing social activities represented the same percentage, 18.75% and other three reasons— getting experiences in doing social activities, gaining leadership skill and having no apparent reason represented 6.25%, respectively.



According to the data, it is found out that Service-Learning has positive impact on the students. They reported that problem solving skill, personal skill, managerial skill, communication and leadership skill become improved because of the activity. Moreover, they become more confident, see the needs of community as well as understand teaching methods.

For second question, the point of becoming more confident is the point most of the students (27.27%) believe they have got from the activity. The improvement of problem solving is the second most common answer (18.18%) among the students. Seeing the improvement of managerial skill represented 13.64%, becoming sympathy on teachers, the improvement of personal skill and seeing the needs of community, 9.09% for each and understanding teaching method and improvement of communication skill, 4.54% respectively. (See below)



Moreover, all the participants believed that every university should have Service-Learning program as they could learn how to overcome difficulties and problems by participating in this activity. Furthermore, one can feel as a useful person and become more active and confident in oneself. It is also reported that they got much knowledge about community and the relation between participants and between participants and community was enhanced by this activity.

Ma Ya Mone Oo, one of the participants said,

"It creates opportunities to get to know about what it would be like in the world ahead."

Moreover, the other participant said,

"There are still so many places to go for Service-Learning and need more members."

The other one reported that:

"I do not want universities only to teach subject matter, they should give opportunities to the students to engage with the real world, which are interesting and fruitful for the students."

Mg Nay MyoTun, one participant reported as follow:

“I think every university should have Service-Learning program and students shouldn’t stay only in class and should study what are happening in the surrounding and do the activities helpful to the community.”

It has been seen that all the participants were happy, active, motivated and interested in Service- Learning activities, in spite of facing some difficulties– electricity going off while using LCD, noises from other classes, time-constraint which is not enough for most of them to finish the lessons prepared, students’ different background knowledge. However, it is reported that they have tried their best to be able to overcome these difficulties, which enhance their problem solving and management skills. Moreover, all the students said they will certainly participate in Service- Learning activities next times if they have chances to participate in it.

According to the survey, it is known that students’ expectations included to get experience and knowledge concerning teaching, to enhance academic skill, interpersonal skill, critical skill, problem solving skill and leadership skill, to know the needs of the community and to learn new things from the community by participating in the activity. Moreover, they had also hoped to know the difficulties and lives of the students from the community.

All the students said they achieved what they had expected from the activity and reported that Service- Learning is really beneficial for them to improve their communication, interpersonal and social skills. After the activity, they reported that they can understand teachers’ kindness and hopes on them and have sympathy on teachers. Moreover, it is reported that they become to see better ways of learning the lessons after they taught others and realize the needs of the community as well as the skills they should have if they wish to do social activities. Therefore, this program is very beneficial to make students enhance academic skill as well as to become better citizens.

Mg Myat Min Khant, one of the participants gave his suggestion for future Service-Learning program as:

“I’d like to suggest if we have more time, we can do the program more efficiently. We must prepare before we teach. If all the Service-Learners are united and work together, our program will last very long.”

Another student suggested that:

“Service-Learning should be a must course for all University students and all the students should participate in it as it can enhance community- university relations.”

Another suggestion is:

“Cooperation this service learning activity with different specialized students may be a good idea and it can make the participants have chances to make new friends, exchange knowledge and experience.”

Conclusion

Service-Learning is still a very new concept in Myanmar and it might be said that Dagon University is the one that implements Service-Learning program in Myanmar as one of the extra-curriculum activities which really benefits not only students but also community and teachers. However, this can make students feel alive and meaningful in their learning by getting chances to serve community by applying what they have learnt from school, which makes them feel confident in their own ability, more motivated in their studies. Moreover, this activity makes them develop communication, problem solving, managerial and cooperation

skills, the soft skills which are priceless for their lives. The essence of this program is it can make the participants see the real needs of community and serve it with the skill they possess and learn new lessons from it. So this is certainly worth offering to the students by every university.

Recommendations

The authors strongly would like to recommend those who are interested in Education Psychology or the impact of extra-curricular activities on students' academic achievements to conduct a research on how Service-Learning affects students' academic and cognitive development. Moreover, it would be very fruitful for teaching field if longitudinal studies of students' academic results could be made before and after participating in Service-Learning.

In this report, it is found out that participating in Service-Learning activity has positive effects on students. But these are only their self-assessment. So, it would be more reliable if we could do a research on the impacts of Service-Learning on the students academically and socially with those who can evaluate their performance and by using their exam result. Then, the scores and evaluations should be compared with those who did not take part in Service-Learning.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia awarding a grant for Service-Learning Program at undergraduate studies at Dagon University. Our thanks also go to Daw Sabai Phyu, principal of the post-primary school, allowing us to conduct this activity at the school and for kind supports thorough out the activity.

References

Online Materials

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service-learning>

<http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/service/benefits.html>

https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&gl=us&client=ms-null&source=android-browserkey&q=report%20on%20service%20learning&gws_rd=ssl

Appendix A (Student List)

No.	Name	Roll No.	Gender	1 st / 2 nd time participated in Service-Learning Program
1	Thet Nandy Zin	2E 108	F	1 st
2	Lae Lae Win	2E 107	F	1 st
3	Nay Myo Htay	2E 190	M	2 nd
4	Ye Paing Oo	1E 242	M	1 st
5	Ya Mone Oo	2E 260	F	1 st
6	Thet Khant Khant Thwe	2E 196	F	1 st
7	Nay MyoTun	2E 152	M	2 nd
8	Aster Phyo	2E 181	F	1 st
9	Nandar Win Tint	4E 315	F	2 nd
10	Hein Thant Thwin	2E 395	M	1 st
11	Kaung Su Thar	2E 224	M	1 st
12	Myat Min Khant	1E 212	M	1 st
13	Moe Thwe	2E 183	F	1 st
14	Win Thiri	2E 369	F	1 st
15	Chit Zizawa Pwint	1E 520	F	2 nd
16	Hnin Ei Phyu	4E 266	F	2 nd

Appendix B (Questionnaires used)

1. Name:
2. Roll no:
3. Date of Birth:
4. Phone no & e-mail address:
5. No of hours participated:
6. Is this the first time for you participated in Service-Learning program? If not, specify:
7. Mention the kind of performance you did during the activity; teaching, cleaning up a public place, educating the community or specify:
8. How do you understand by the term, Service-Learning?
9. Do you think participating in Service- Learning activities can make you become better citizens and more motivated in doing the activities helpful to the community? Why/ Why not?
10. What did you expect to achieve from participating in Service- Learning activity?
11. Did you achieve what you expected from the activity? How?
12. Do you think Service- Learning is beneficial to your academic study? If yes, in which ways is it helpful to your study?
13. What do you think you gained from the activity (lessons/ knowledge or insights)? State them briefly.
14. Did you encounter any problems or difficulties during the activity? If yes, specify.
15. How did you feel during the activity; happy, motivated, excited, bored, frustrated or others.....?
16. If you have the chance to take part in Service-Learning activities again, will you participate in it? Why/ why not?
17. Will you encourage or discourage your friends or classmates to take part in Service-Learning? Why?
18. Do you think every university should have Service-Learning program for university students? Why/ why not?
19. Do you see any difference in yourself after participating in Service-Learning program? If yes, specify.
20. Write down any of your comments, suggestions or questions so that we could try to make future Service-Learning activities more demanding, effective and interesting?

Appendix C (Some Photos of the Activities)



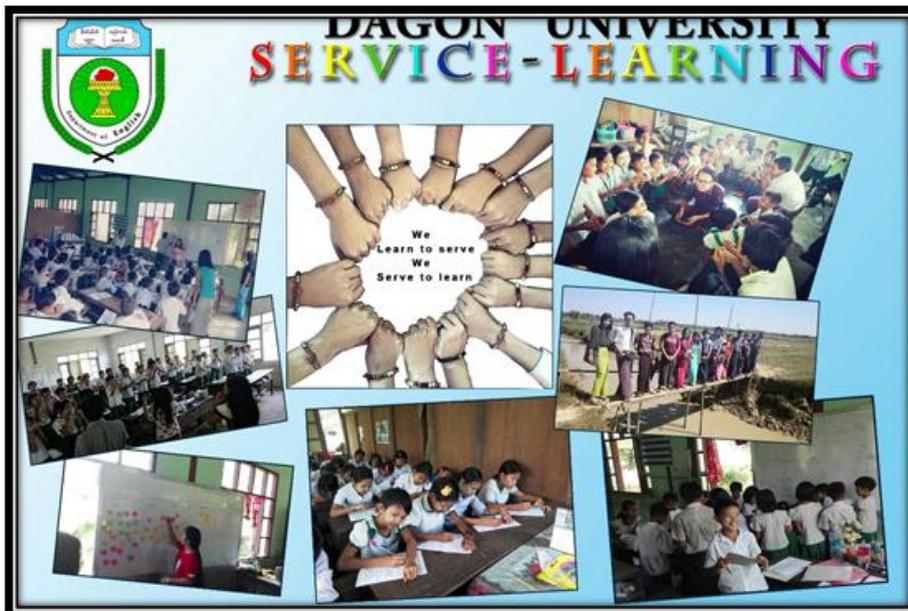
The school where Service-Learning activity done



Service-Learners
Discussing and Lesson-
Preparing before the
Activity



Service-Learners and the students doing the activities happily and actively together



Some reflections of the activity