IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: THE CASE AT UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, HUE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: The term Community Service Learning (CSL) is known as an effective learning program that helps the student produce reflective assignments. Due to its practicality, CSL is thus considered as one of the most useful supports for pre-service teachers and has gradually developed over the recent decades. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards CSL as well as enhance their awareness towards community teaching, then find out the ways to extend this type of education program. Taking these aims into accounts, the questionnaire was used to help the author easily research the attitudes, obstacles, and needs of the participants. Moreover, the semi-structured interview technique was used to have a detailed insight into CSL problems. Consequently, the main findings initially revealed that pre-service teachers had a relatively high awareness of the necessity and benefits of CSL. Secondly, the results implied that problems encountered during the program and the lack of supports was noticeably pointed out. Additionally, the pre-service teachers also agreed that one of the major contributions to CSL success was teachers' consistency. Interestingly, participants showed different opinions when they were questioned whether CSL was compulsory in the learning curriculum. By exposing some limitations, the research implied some significant considerations for the community, universities and pre-service teachers. Finally, some suggestions for further studies were offered to hopefully help the CSL programs become more popular and effective.

Key words: Community service learning, SL, pre-service teachers

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The term Community Service Learning (CSL) is increasingly popular all over the world in the field of education and language teaching, especially at tertiary level (Benson & Harkavy, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher 1996; Enos & Morton, 2003; Williams, 2009; Yaman & Özdemir, 2012; Filiz & Durnali, 2019). Kesten (2012) showed in his study that CSL plays an indispensable role in connecting the society and universities and putting universities in the "hearts of individuals" (Benson & Harkavy, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher 1996; Enos & Morton, 2003). Despite the important role of CSL, there is little research considering the problem that professional community constitutes a resource for teacher learning and innovations in teaching practice (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Furthermore, there are a limited number of studies related to CSL in the Vietnam context, particularly the studies on pre-service teachers' perceptions and their opinions of CSL courses. However, the study, which was implemented at Phuoc Duyen pagoda in Hue city by Cao Thi Xuan Lien (2015) has greatly contributed to the success of the present study with valuable findings and implications. She concluded that CSL is highly appreciated as a teaching tool providing the connections between life and academics. Training pre-service teachers through CSL programs, which aims to provide pedagogical students teaching skills and experience before they become in-service staff, thus should be taken into more consideration.

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1.2. Aims of the study

This research aims to examine EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs, attitudes towards the community service learning and enhance their awareness towards community teaching as required tasks before they become in-service teachers with a particular context in Hue city. Additionally, the study is supposed to find out the ways to support the development of this type of education program. The study will be conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of pre-service teachers at HU-UFL towards the concept of CSL in higher education?

2. What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers of implementing CSL activities?

3. What difficulties did pre-service teachers encounter when they implemented CSL?

1.3. Significance of the study

This study investigated of the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards CSL, who used to teach or who are teaching at the English community in Hue. Through the questionnaires and the interview, the study explored some deeper aspects of community teaching as a teaching practice process, some difficulties the teachers had to encounter when they implemented CSL activities and also suggested some solutions to conduct CSL projects more effectively. This research also gave some practical implications to help CSL programs become more effective and popular.

1.4. Scope of the study

This research was conducted in some charitable classes at pagodas in Hue city. Although there were not enough cases to describe CSL activities comprehensively, studying these classes would hopefully provide valuable data on this kind of CSL program. Accordingly, the reality of CSL practice could be reflected accurately. In particular, the study aimed at some certain aspects: the perceptions of pre-service teachers to CSL's significance and benefits; the important factors to conduct and maintain CSL in the long term; some difficulties pre-service teachers may meet during CSL programs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical background

Campbell (1996) defined the pre-service teacher as an individual engaged in his or her teacher preparation program with no more than two semesters or terms remaining to complete the course of studies. Discussion of how to define the term service-learning (SL) is often the source of disagreement among proponents. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) defined SL as "a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (p. 112). Yet, they do not provide a comprehensive definition of SL.

Service learning could be considered as a preparation stage for students' internship, which students have opportunities to bring their knowledge to real situations and increase their educational experiences - a powerful instrument improving students' practical abilities (Manathunga, 2007). Furco (1996) clarified this type of training that SL programs need to be more institutionalized with higher responsibilities from participants compared to volunteer activities. Also, he suggested that kind of learning should be conducted in the long run since it takes constant efforts by students to perceive and satisfy society requirements.

CSL has been investigated and experimented on multi-aspects in various parts in the world so far. As discussed above, there were a number of studies on identifying and differentiating the term CSL with other volunteer projects. Initially, Sigmon (1979) considered CSL as a probationary method in relation with

"reciprocal learning" which means both sides (the CSL servers and the recipients) would benefit from this kind of program. In fact, there were only a few studies which examine exactly how SL impacts on students, particularly pre-service teachers. Kesten (2012) found in his study that CSL contributes to educational and professional success and mapping profession performance (Gökçe, 2011; Luchs, 1980; Warburton & Oppenheimer, 2000). SL is a shared collaborative process that can involve not only students and learning institutions but also every unit of the society, including the communities (Sandaran, 2008).

It is reported that SL exists in every state in the U.S. and spread out internationally: 64% of all public schools and 83% of public high schools organize some form of community service for their students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1999). However, CSL has witnessed a downward trend in recent years. Scale and Roehlkepartain (2005) explained that SL is more likely to have more positive effects on students' involvement in the low-income areas. It is highly valued in these regions owing to the belief that CSL can also bring opportunities for young people to work with adults and develop leadership skills as well as have benefits. According to the article Community Service and SL in America's Schools (2008), the schools which apply SL in their curriculum are more likely to have more encouragements and practices than in 1999; it is, however, still hardly in compliance with institutions due to the limitations of supporting staff, improvement strategies and compulsory requests as well as the lack of assistance to participants.

Noticeably, there have been still a few studies regarding CSL as a method to support pedagogical students in learning. The most recent study implemented by Lien (2015) has shown the significance of CSL to education in general and in English teaching and learning context. By using questionnaires and End-of-semester reflections for 40 students as well as interviewing 8 teachers who teach some English classes at Phuoc Duyen pagoda in Hue city, she concluded that CSL also brings lots of advantages for faculties of universities or education agencies. However, some other issues such as the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards CSL and how to implement this kind of program sustainably create the research gap for this study to continue discovering.

2.2. The study context

Normally, fourth-year students of the Pedagogy sector at HU-UFL implement the teaching internship in a very short time, from 1 to 2 months. Furthermore, students are trained with some practical teaching methodology courses and as a result, most of the students are worried when they carry out their internship. Therefore, community teaching would be a good opportunity for these students to have more practical teaching experiences before they graduate from the university. The study was conducted at some English charity classes of some pagodas in Hue city.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research methods

According to Condelli and Wrigley (2004), quantitative approach, in addition to qualitative one, can help researchers deepen their understandings of findings and infer from those results. Therefore, this study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a more reliable understanding of its results. Accordingly, the questionnaire was conducted to provide data relating to the agreement degree of participants towards some previous opinions while the semi-structured interview helped the researcher figure out other characteristics of CSL, the attitude as well as experience of pre-service teachers during the time implementing CSL.

3.2. Participants

Due to some difficulties with contacting, the number of participants in this study is 20 English pedagogical students in HU-UFL who have experience in teaching at the community in Hue city. They are pre-service teachers (pedagogical students) with a wide range of experience (teaching at a community for over 1 month). As pre-service teachers have gained a great deal of experience in teaching process, the study would have an in-depth analysis of the results. All participants were asked to do the questionnaire. Among them, 5 teachers who had taught community classes for over 3 months were chosen to participate in the interview. They have more comprehensive opinions and CSL teaching experience.

3.3. Instruments

To accomplish the primary purpose of this study, the questionnaire is chosen as the main method for statistical data collection. It includes 2 main parts: The first part is intended to get the background information of the participants; the second part is presented in a 5-point-Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Most of the items in this section were adopted and adapted from previous studies to make comparisons and find implications. Since the questionnaire is designed for students, the questionnaire will be expounded clearly in English to ensure the understandings of the participants. After that, the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire was coded to be analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 20. The descriptive statistics were run then to gain the mean scores and standard deviations of each cluster. These data were helpful in making comparisons between cluster-cluster and items in one cluster. Additionally, the one-sample T-test was also conducted to determine the differences between participants' perceptions towards CSL and the hypothesis. In addition to data illustrated by tables, some bar charts were created accordingly to facilitate visible demonstrations. Data were analyzed by referring to results from previous research.

The semi-structured interview is used for this research in order to collect quite sufficient responses in a short time. Also, the semi-structured interview provides the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand. According to Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015), in mixed methods research, this technique can be considered as an extension and "add depth" to other methods. The participants will be more comfortable because they can talk about the topic according to their flow of speech. By asking attendants' experience and listening to their stories, the author may have a more general and profound overview of CSL problems. Therefore, the data would be explored more effectively. Apart from the questionnaire, the interview is conducted using Vietnamese to help participants express their ideas precisely and thoroughly. The recorded qualitative data from the interview were first noted down carefully in Vietnamese to make the respondents express their opinions more thoroughly; the answers were then translated into English for later analysis. After that, the responses were grouped following the research questions for easy referring and analyzing.

4. Findings

This section presents and interprets the collected data. First, the effects of community teaching towards pre-service teachers have presented thanks to the statistical results of the questionnaire. Then, the results from the interviews are also analyzed in order to get insights into the results.

4.1. Questionnaire

First of all, the questionnaire is confirmed to be reliable with the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire α= .913 (reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered "acceptable", according to Garth, 2008).

Table 1. Mean scores of clusters

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean score of Cluster 1	20	2.67	4.83	4.3833	.50175
Mean score of Cluster 2	20	2.93	4.87	4.1667	.46415
Mean score of Cluster 3	20	3.00	5.00	4.2300	.55165
Mean score of Cluster 4	20	1.86	4.57	3.2143	.86649
Valid N (listwise)	20				

Generally, pre-service teachers showed their high expectations of the necessity as well as advantages brought from CSL. All of the clusters saw the high rank of "degree". After having analyzed, Clusters 1, 2, 3 all showed the mean scores above 4 (4.38; 4.16; 4.23 respectively), which implies that most of the pre-service teachers have positive attitudes towards CSL and awareness of its benefits. The mean score of cluster 4 was by far different from three others (M=3.21). This figure expresses that most of the participants did not hold a high level of agreement with CSL difficulties.

4.1.1. Attitudes of pre-service teachers towards the necessity of CSL

Table 2. Mean score of Cluster 1: Necessity of CSL in relation to institution and community of CSL

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Universities build better communication with both the students and the environment	20	3	5	4.35	.587
Students are familiar with other institutions and society	20	2	5	4.30	.733
Prospective teachers can continue involvement in society and become caring citizens	20	3	5	4.70	.571
CSL involves special knowledge	20	1	5	4.35	.933
CSL can deepen the tie between university and community	20	2	5	4.20	.951
CSL meets the needs of community and generate multi-experiences for Ss	20	2	5	4.40	.821
Valid N (listwise)	20				

The results from the table point out that pre-service teachers acknowledge and show a high level of agreement with the necessities of CLT towards the institution and community. In detail, the mean score of *Prospective teachers can continue involvement in society and become caring citizen* was the highest among these items (M=4.70, SD=.571). This finding is in line with the results of Shelley (2000) that the percentage of students in the U.S involving in-service programs increased because their parents and teachers believed CSL helped to create "better citizen.' Also, the high level of participants' agreement with four remaining items was in line with Williams (2009) and her colleagues that service provided meets the needs of the people they serve and brought a plentiful experience for all participants.

4.1.2. Benefits of CSL

In Cluster 2, the item *Improve self-confidence and leadership skills* showed the highest mean score (M=4.50) which could be interpreted that pre-service teachers highly valued these benefits. However, the data in Table 4.3 showed the relative difference in distance between the min and max score. Some items such as *Promote empathy and responsibility for students; Reduce stereotypes; facilitate cultural and racial understanding; Enhance teaching quality, find opportunities for further research* point out the high degree of SD, at above .85.

4.1.3. Making CSL sustainable

In Cluster 3, participants had similar ideas about the key factors to maintain CSL in the long term (t=1.865; df=19) although there was some disagreement with the first and second items of this cluster *more courses should be incorporate with SL, CSL must be a strategy/ policy of the institutions.* By constrast, Guo (2013) showed that educators consider SL as an effective teaching tool. Especially, there were many participants showing agreement with the last item *CSL should be known by all staff and students*, which is explained in the Interview's findings.

4.1.4. Problems and difficulties of CSL

The mean score of Cluster 4 was significantly different from three others (M=3.21), which expressed that most of the participants did not hold a high level of agreement with CSL difficulties, which means that participants have different opinions about the problems they can encounter during the teaching program. The participants chose a wide range of answers, from "completely degree" to "completely agree" level, which

can be interpreted from SD numbers (most SD scores were over 1.0). Otherwise, most of the participants agreed that implementing CSL was difficult due to the *lack of supports* (M=3.70). Similarly, Guo (2013) stated in his study that once the program is widely supported, the benefits will overweigh the negatives.

4.2. Interview

The result was taken from 5 responses of 5 pre-service teachers who have been involved in the CSL program over 3 months. All the answers were recorded and written down for reliability. There were some noticeable points shown during the interview. Firstly, almost all participants have not understood CSL thoroughly; they could not even distinguish between CSL and volunteer activities. The result revealed that students did not have a comprehensive look at CSL though they put great efforts to maintain it. Secondly, all of the participants shared the same opinion that CSL helped them to improve social skills and gain valuable knowledge of the society. Importantly, students mostly agreed with three key factors to CSL's success and durability: the requirement of CSL coordinators who connect all parties together and manage CSL activities; teachers' dedication and teaching ability; the right evaluation of community's need. Finally, most of participants agreed that they sometimes find hard to cope with other pre-service teachers who have different expectations of CSL.

5. Discussion and implications

5.1. Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire concluded that CSL has a great effect on pre-service teachers' practice and it should be implemented as a supplemental teaching method besides traditional learning programs. In particular, there was a high level of participants' agreement with the items in Cluster 1, which was in line with the study by Williams (2009) and her colleagues: service provided meets the needs of the people they serve and brought a plentiful experience for all participants. Another agreement is that CSL should be taken into account by principals and conducted with the supports from CSL coordinators. Without their help, all respondents claimed, they would have faced numerous problems such as lack of consistent organization and local interaction. This finding matched with the results in the study of Guo (2013), stating that CSL needs the collaboration from all parties. The pre-service teachers also concurred with the idea that the most important contributions to CSL success were teachers' passion and enthusiasm. In addition, there is no significant disparity among the clusters, except for cluster 4 which implies that problems encountered during the program are not the most affecting factors and variables to participants.

However, there were different points of view regarding implementing CSL mandatorily in universities in the interview. Most of the interviewees had objections to this proposal because it could lead to the unwillingness and ineffective outcomes. The responses from participants showed that students would feel annoyed and only attend the CSL with personal purposes. Interestingly, all participants concur with the idea that CSL should be regarded as an extracurricular activity in university curriculums. When CSL is used as a pedagogical tool, the students may pay more attention and spend a significant amount of their time and attempts to serve programs with higher responsibilities. Although students encountered some obstacles during the program, these limitations can be considered as a part of the learning process, which encourages them to show their high level of performance.

5.2. Implications

The positive feedbacks from CSL participants have proven the essential importance and effectiveness of the CSL program. The following implications aim to provide the most sufficient insight into CSL's reality and some solutions to implement CSL more extensively and effectively.

5.2.1. Implications for organizations conducting CSL

It can be seen from the findings that students in general, pre-service teachers, in particular, should be encouraged to participate in this program as a kind of learning due to the lack of professional practice time. Students may feel reluctant to participate and make CSL lose its original purpose; this kind of learning thus should be added into the current curriculum like an extracurricular activity which can get more students involved in and provide high-quality service.

Additionally, as the lack of supports was seen as the biggest difficulty, all related organizations, from authorities to universities, should give more supports for these projects and make efforts to popularize them to people. There should be coordinators who are eligible for managing CSL activities and connecting students to the community as well as universities. Once CSL programs are applied officially, they will have valuable contributions to society, universities, and students.

5.2.2. Implications for pre-service teachers

Firstly, students should have a proper conceptualization of the term CSL before participating. One anticipated problem before conducting this research is that students do not have a certain understanding of this kind of education. CSL is usually known as voluntary work and the community is supposed to be the only object benefiting from CSL. Therefore, students should be made aware of the CSL purposes before taking part in it. Once they understand that CSL not only brings benefits to the community but also helps them to improve personal skills like a learning program, they can be more willing to contribute to CSL.

Secondly, pre-service teachers should always train themselves to gain the best knowledge and pedagogical competence. Within this context, the program aims to help poor students overcome some of their prejudice about English and get closer to this subject, so teachers must try their best to bring valuable lessons to their students and maintain learners' interests. In addition, this program has met a variety of difficulties due to the mixed level, learning styles and different ages of students. Teachers hence must have the ability to solve these problems with necessary teaching skills and the application of diverse activities. Another important aspect is the teachers' passion. Teaching charity classes is a durable process that requires lots of responsibility from participants. Therefore, teachers must identify their goals clearly before conducting and keep going in the long term.

6. Conclusion

Conducted at some charitable classes in Hue city, the research aimed to find out the perception of students who are going to become in-service teachers towards CSL and the essential factors to maintain this kind of learning. From the findings of the questionnaire and the interview, the research went to some following conclusions. Firstly, the high level of agreement showed that CSL plays a significant role in connecting students with universities and the community. Secondly, participants showed high awareness of the huge benefits that community, universities and students received after conducting CSL. Apart from that, pre-service teachers indicated that the problems they encountered during the program were not the most affecting factors which depended on each participant's condition. Most students agreed that CSL should be taken into accounts by principals and conducted with the supports from CSL coordinators. Without the help from them, all students claimed, they would have faced numerous problems such as lack of consistent organization and local interaction. The pre-service teachers also concurred with the idea that the most important contributions to CSL success were teachers' passion and enthusiasm.

However, the proposal relating to implementing CSL as a requirement at schools should be discussed and conducted carefully. Once students understand that CSL not only brings benefits to the community but also improve their personal skills, they can be more willing to contribute to CSL.

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TRIỂN KHAI HỌC TẬP PHỤC VỤ CỘNG ĐỒNG CHO GIÁO VIÊN TRƯỚC KHI DẠY HỌC: TRƯỜNG HỢP TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ, ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ

Tóm tắt: Thuật ngữ Học Tập Phục Vụ Cộng Đồng (HTPVCĐ) được biết đến như một chương trình học hiệu quả giúp sinh viên thực hiện được những bài tập có tính phản biện hơn. Nhờ tính thực tiễn của nó, HTPVCĐ được xem như một trong những sự hỗ trợ hiệu quả nhất cho những giáo viên trước khi dạy học (GVTRDH) và đã dần phát triển trong thời gian qua. Do đó, nghiên cứu này có mục tiêu điều tra thái độ của những GVTRDH đối với HTPVCĐ cũng như nhằm nâng cao nhận thức của họ đối với việc dạy học cộng đồng, bên cạnh đó tìm ra các giải pháp mở rộng chương trình này. Từ những mục tiêu trên, bảng hỏi đã được sử dụng nhằm giúp tác giả có thể dễ dàng tìm hiểu được thái độ, những khó khăn và nhu cầu của sinh viên. Bên cạnh đó, phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc được tiến hành để có cái nhìn sâu hơn về những vấn đề tồn tại của HTPVCĐ. Sau khi tiến hành nghiên cứu, những kết quả chính bước đầu thể hiện rằng các GVTKDH nhận thức khá tốt về tính cần thiết và những lợi ích mà HTPVCĐ mang lại. Hai là, kết quả cho thấy những vấn đề gặp phải trong suốt chương trình và sự thiếu hỗ trợ cần được chú ý xem xét. Ngoài ra, GVTKDH cũng tán thành rằng một trong những yếu tố quan trọng dẫn tới sự thành công của HTPVCĐ là tính kiên trì của giáo viên. Đáng thú vị là, những người tham gia đã đưa ra những quan điểm khác nhau khi họ được hỏi về việc có nên đưa HTPVCĐ vào chương trình học bắt buộc hay không. Từ những giới hạn được nêu ra, nghiên cứu gợi ý những cân nhắc kỹ về cộng đồng, các trường đại học và GVTKDH. Cuối cùng, một vài đề xuất cho những nghiên cứu sau cũng được cung cấp để hi vọng có thể giúp HTPVCĐ trở nên rộng rãi và hiệu quả hơn.

Từ khóa: Học tập phục vụ cộng đồng, học tập - phục vụ, giáo viên trước khi dạy