

Journal of International Students
Volume 14, Issue 1 (2024), pp. 469-486
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
jistudents.org

Examining Service Learning as an Approach to Intensify International Students' Multicultural Understanding

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to identify, examine, and analyse the opinions of four international postgraduate students who embarked on a service-learning project required by the course taken in Semester 2, 2021/2022. It included engaging in community service, connection to their academic endeavours, reporting the outcomes, critical reflection, and reciprocity. Choral speaking activities were selected as the tool for their engagement with children in the community. The qualitative approach was chosen as the research design, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews. The findings pointed to the beneficial aspects of service-learning which include: (1) enhances multicultural understanding; (2) improves civic involvement; (3) acknowledges that academic work has real-world importance; and (4) promotes language learning as well as reciprocity, that need to be improved.

Keywords: service-learning, International Students, Globalisation of Education, Diversity

This study was inspired by the present trend of globalisation, which is the interaction of people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Dash & Gandhi, 2022; Raikhan et al., 2014). Our personal and professional lives are becoming increasingly populated by people from all walks of life, exposing us to a wide range of cultures. Consequently, the significance of cultural understanding and respect for cultural differences is becoming more evident (Leon-Henri & Jain, 2017). In light of this, involvement in the community is a crucial component of academic and student life. In meeting the needs of diverse learners and preparing them to be effective in a diverse society, Bezukh (2017) asserts that

removing diverse perspectives from the curriculum has hindered students' learning. As a result, students are unprepared to function in a democracy that is becoming increasingly diverse.

International students who newly embarked on their learning pathway often faced challenges of adaptation in the host country. This claim is illustrated in studies by Hussain and Shen (2019) and Wu et al. (2015), where their findings revealed that international students studying abroad do experience issues such as academic challenges, cultural adjustment, and social isolation. However, with the right ingredients in teaching and learning, these challenges can serve as opportunities. Exposing students to the outside world, which could enhance students' multicultural awareness, would cause a host of societal issues because higher education often attempts to help students get a greater grasp of the world. For example, when students understand the concept of freedom of speech, they tend to question the policy of freedom of speech in their countries. In addition, the education system's traditional lecture technique needs to be more effective in meeting the needs of millennial pupils. A standard lecture appears insufficient to provide graduates with an engaging and successful course. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2019), community engagement improves academic learning, fosters relationships beyond the campus, and prepares students for the future. Integrating community programs into the curriculum at the tertiary level produces an educational environment in which students make not only academic advancement but also undergo personal and professional transformation. As stated by Vogelgesang (2004):

In many service-learning situations, students work in communities composed of people socioeconomically or racially different from themselves. As the prevalence of service-learning grows on college campuses, attention to the issues around training students to participate meaningfully in such communities needs to expand. Participating in service-learning is one of many potential situations in which students deal with diversity while in college, but it has important implications for college and community relationships in general and warrants special attention (p.34).

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand," - the famous quote by Benjamin Franklin aptly summarises the power of direct involvement or active participation in promoting deeper learning and understanding. Deslauriers et al. (2019) discovered that students who participate in an active learning environment learn more than those who participate in a passive learning environment, resulting in better educational outcomes. Prince (2004) claimed that active learning can be defined as any instructional strategy that involves students in the learning process and requires them to engage in meaningful learning activities while also thinking about what they are doing. On a lighter note, active learning is any learning activity that places students at its focal point rather than passively taking in the information from the teacher. In the twenty-first century, many pedagogies can be classified as active learning strategies, and service learning is one of them (Clayton et al., 2013).

While classroom learning and experience are both meaningful, it is equally essential for students to apply and make connections between what they are learning and what they will encounter in the real world. The only way to accomplish this is to connect with

community members, learn from their life experiences, and incorporate those lessons into one's own experiences.

Firstly, before delving deeper into service-learning, it is essential to understand the distinctions between the five service programs available today: volunteerism, community service, service-learning, field education, and internship (Furco, 1996) as these terms are not synonymous and are sometimes used interchangeably (Fertman, 1994; Salleh Hudin et al., 2018).

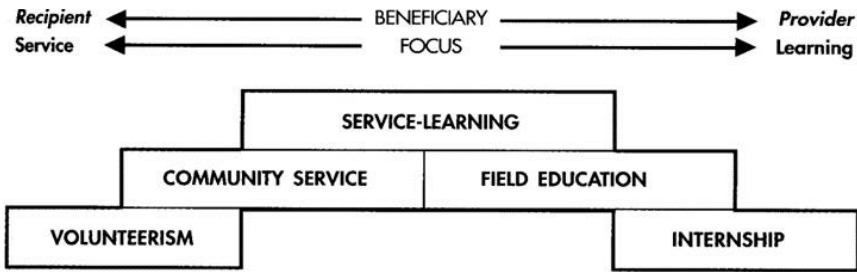


Figure 1: Distinctions Among Service Programs (Source: Furco, 1996)

The Furco diagram above demonstrates the differences between the five types of service programs. Each program is distinguished by who the service activity is for and the emphasis placed on service and learning. By distinguishing between the five types of service programs, readers can come closer to a universal definition of service learning. According to Jacoby and Howard (2014), on the left side of the Furco model, volunteerism and community service are intended to benefit the individual, organization, or community served. On the bottom rung of the model, volunteerism is a one-way program and a form of charity with no conscious connection to reflection or learning.

The curriculum is designed to satisfy community demands in terms of community service. These initiatives might be longer-lasting and more structured than volunteering, giving the beneficiaries a greater sense of purpose. Only sometimes does community service include contemplation, and it might require additional academic credibility and legitimacy. Many educational institutions have a long tradition of volunteering and doing community service (Afzal & Hussain, 2020), with examples including food and toy drives, fundraisers, special events, and disaster relief. By linking these experiences to learning, service learning deepens them (Fertman, 1994). This is due to the fact that service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich students' learning experiences, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (NSLC website, n.d., as cited in Miller et al., 2015). A growing body of research shows that service learning has a profound impact on the development of international students, and the benefits extend beyond personal outcomes to civic, cognitive, and academic outcomes as well. Scholars believe that service learning aids students' language development, particularly for international students (Wurr, 2009; Heuser, 1999, as cited in Sun & Yang, 2015), fosters students' intercultural awareness (Askildson et al., 2013; Grim, 2010), deepens their understanding of social issues and civic engagement (Perren et al., 2013), and assists students in recognising the value of their academic work (Elwell & Bean, 2001).

Service-Learning Advantages

(a) Personal growth and development

When addressing the subtleties of a specific community issue, there are frequent opportunities for self-discovery and development. The nuances and meanings that may not be immediately clear in the classroom or textbook are frequently better understood by students. Service learning, a crucial component of higher education in contemporary society, is therefore especially beneficial for assisting students in understanding the challenges of diversity (Sperling, 2007). The development of moral and spiritual values, empathy, self-efficacy, a sense of personal and societal responsibility, and a dedication to volunteer work both during and after college are all enhanced by service learning. Moreover, through service learning, students build civic and workplace skills in communication, leadership, and cooperation. Those who engage in service learning are reported to have greater satisfaction, are more likely to pursue service-related occupations, and are more confident in their professional choices (Jacoby & Howard, 2014; Warren, 2012; Celio et al., 2011). Fertman (1994) highlights that parents, students, educators, and administrators can move beyond their typical roles and work as equals towards a common objective through service learning. This improves relationships between these groups and fosters cooperation beyond the service-learning environment.

(b) Enhance Multicultural Understanding

Based on studies by Askildson et al. (2013) and Grim (2010), there is strong evidence that service learning enhances cultural and racial awareness and diminishes stereotypical thinking. Due to its emphasis on learning in the context of service to others, service learning can broaden students' horizons beyond the classroom (O'Grady, 2000). Service learning, which encourages self-reflection, is a special technique that can help students reflect on cultural differences to develop cultural competency. Given the diversity of today's society, the public recreation sector must provide students with opportunities to connect with diverse community members (Smith et al., 2011). According to Jacoby and Howard (2014), students who engage in service learning have the opportunity to experience and act on the issues individuals and communities confront, engage in discourse and problem-solving with those most affected, and observe the effects of racism, sexism, poverty, and depression firsthand. This is because students can appreciate the relevance of course content to real-world situations, the complexity of the social fabric, and how they can choose to be part of the solution rather than the problem when they reflect on topics connected to their experiences.

According to Jamaluddin & Idrus (2021), when international students first moved abroad to pursue their studies, they would feel more at ease making friends only with students of a similar nationality. However, as they became more accustomed to the local culture and began to mingle, they tended to be more accepting and eventually formed friendships with students from various nationalities, including the locals. Thus, service-learning can be capitalised on to boost international students' multicultural awareness.

(c) Strengthen partnerships

According to Fertman (1994), developing partnerships between the school and the community can be facilitated via service learning. It directs schools to address homelessness, hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and environmental concerns. The community begins to look to schools for insight and problem-solving due to students' community service. In addition to educating students about the community and the organization's issues and population, service learning can also provide data to leverage grants and other funding, strengthen networking among community organisations, allow budgetary savings, advance the organization's overall goals, contribute to the organization's visibility, and provide better service to clients (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Furthermore, service learning will enable students to develop new relationships and tasks in real-life settings with adults willing to offer their ideas, information, skills, perceptions, and experiences, and vice versa (Jacoby & Howard, 2014; Fertman, 1994).

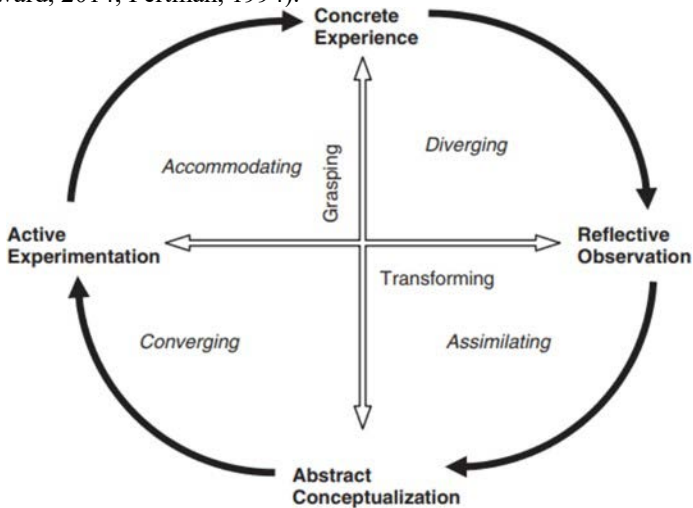


Figure 2: Experiential Learning Cycle (Source: Kolb, 2009)

The Concept of Service-Learning

The concept of how service-learning influences successful learning is based on David Kolb's (1979) experiential learning model, which consists of four iterative stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, as seen in Figure 2 below. His work has become a cornerstone of experiential learning theory and has had a global impact on educators (Ball, 2008).

Kolb noticed that most student learning is incomplete and that successful learning requires the learner to complete the entire cycle and, in some instances, repeatedly until the object is mastered. Individuals may enter the cycle at any stage; however, service learning and other forms of experiential education are frequently structured to begin with, concrete experience. In other words, in order to generate ideas that combine observations into logically sound theories (abstract conceptualization), students must be able to engage in new experiences fully, openly, and without prejudice (concrete experience), reflect on, understand, and interpret these experiences from various perspectives (reflective

observation), and use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (active experimentation) that lead to new experiences (concrete experience) (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Jacoby & Howard, 2014).

Choral Speaking

The term refers to the recitation of poetry, dramatic pieces, etc. by a chorus of speakers. Oratory aids in their vocabulary growth and articulation improvement, among other things. It aids in their grammar improvement and teaches them how to employ intonation in a variety of contexts, which is a very useful ability. They also study other strategies, such as pauses and silences. Additionally, it demonstrates to students the value of good body language, nonverbal communication, and the importance of projecting confidence, composure, and leadership qualities. In their engagement, the international students introduced and taught the children of the community the art of choral speaking. The reason for selecting choral speaking is that it is one of many English competitions held by the Ministry of Education Malaysia with the goal of encouraging and increasing the usage of English among Malaysian school students in government-aided schools. In addition, given the large number of students in the community, we felt that, of all the English competitions organised, choral speaking is the most appropriate one because it is light and pleasant in comparison to other competitions such as debate and public speaking.

METHOD

Research Design and Instrumentation

This study focuses on service-learning to improve students' multicultural understanding. A critical qualitative research design was utilised to address the objectives of this study. Obuya and Ong'ondo (2020) stated that a qualitative research method is used to study individuals and events in their natural settings. Since the research is aimed at looking at the perceptions and responses of the respondents to the services carried out, the qualitative research method is deemed fit because it helps researchers understand experiences, phenomena, and contexts and allows them to ask questions that cannot be easily quantified.

Purposive sampling was carried out. The service-learning projects were executed in one village near the university by the respondents. There were five meetings scheduled by the students. They were interviewed after they had completed their project in the village. In-depth-interview questions and probing were done to obtain insights from them. However, they were required to write their reflections after each meeting.

The two primary sources of data used in this study were semi-structured interviews and students' reflections. The respondents who took part in the study were graduate students from various faculties at the university. All four of the graduate students are international students, coming from South Africa, the Philippines, India, and Indonesia, respectively. Their age ranges from 23 to 30 years old, they are of various nationalities, and, most importantly, they are current postgraduate students. The interview sessions were recorded, transcribed, and coded. To avoid biases towards the topic, the researchers

remained as neutral as possible during the interview. Table 1 below provides an overview of the participants' details.

Each of them provided verbal approval to participate in the research. As part of their course requirements, the students have participated in at least two service-learning projects in the past in which they interacted and engaged with various people in the community. They have had some experience working with adults in nursing homes and organising service learning for disadvantaged children and adolescents. In addition to distributing donations, participants engaged in activities such as storytelling, teaching English for communication, creating handicrafts, playing games, and cleaning up houses and mosques.

Table 1: Respondents

Respondents	Nationality	Age	Gender	Faculty	First language
R1	Indonesian	24	Female	Education	Indonesian
R2	South African	23	Male	Education	English
R3	Filipino	30	Female	Religious Study	Tausug
R4	Indian	28	Male	Engineering	Hindi/English

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from the respondents. Longhurst (2009) claimed that semi-structured interviews not only include a series of important questions that help outline the areas to be investigated but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to deviate in order to delve deeper into an idea or response. Meanwhile, Mackey and Gass (2015) stated that researchers can use interviews to look into phenomena that aren't easily visible, such as learners' self-reported perceptions and attitudes. In this study, respondents were asked to participate in a thirty-minute to one-hour interview to answer open-ended questions about their experiences with service-learning.

A pilot study, also known as a feasibility study, is often conducted as a mockup of the main study. This is to ensure the instrument meant to be used for the real investigation is suitable and reflects the objectives of the research. A pilot study may provide feedback such as inadequate information and possible issues that might arise when the real study is conducted. This will allow the researcher to minimise, as much as possible, any possible shortcomings in the main study.

Thus, the interview questions were piloted with one participant to gauge the reliability of the questions asked. The recording was analysed to identify areas that could be potentially redundant or misleading. Piloting has proven beneficial to the researchers, as there were several interview questions that needed amendments in order to get clearer responses from the participants. Some of the key questions before and after the meetings with the community are listed in Table 2 below. Probing questions were used.

Table 2: Interview Questions Before and After the Meetings with The Community

Before

What were your expectations of the community?
What were your preparations to communicate with the community effectively?
What are your worries (if any)?

After

Did you enjoy your service-learning project? Why?
Did this project fulfil your expectations? Why?
What do you feel is your main contribution to the choral speaking project?
Do you feel like you are an integral part of our class project?
What has been the most difficult part of the project for you?
What insights have you gained into people and community in this project?
What are some new cultural aspects that you have gained from engaging yourself with the community and children?
What are some of the cultural practices that are similar to and different from your own?

This study was not designed to make generalisations about all communities that associate with service-learning projects but rather to focus on the perceptions of the benefits of service-learning in a small, semi-rural setting in Selangor, Malaysia.

Reflective Journal

The reflective journal, which is kept throughout the study process in qualitative research, is a written account by the researchers themselves. The specifics of the researchers' actions, thoughts, and emotions during the data analysis are recorded in a reflective notebook. Then, the justification for those ideas and perceptions is noted. In order to evaluate "personal assumptions and aspirations" and to clarify "individual belief systems and subjectivities," researchers should keep self-reflective journals throughout the analysis process (Russell & Kelly, 2002, p. 2). By doing so, keeping reflective journals allows researchers to deliberately recognise their own experiences and values rather than trying to manipulate those values through methodology. To put it another way, the reflective practice motivates researchers to discuss their experiences and actions and justifies their decision-making. In the context of this current study, the respondents were required to write five entries (one entry for every meeting) related to their project with the community. They may write about the event in whatever way they want.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, one community (an underprivileged community two kilometres away from the university) was selected a few weeks prior to the start of the interviews. An unofficial visit was planned for the first time (with the community) was used to help build rapport with members of the community and gain insight into cultural norms that they may not have understood otherwise. The service-learning group consisted of six people in total, and the final project was a two-day choral speaking activities for children (8–12 years old) in the community. During this time, the researchers acted as facilitators while observing community members and their interactions within the context of this specific service-learning project. Respondents prepared Choral Speaking (CS) materials and familiarised themselves with the technique. Only one Choral Speaking material which topics related to living in a multicultural society. When the actual date had been decided, the team went to the community to run the actual project. Researchers interviewed the respondents about the experiences they had while conducting the service-learning project. Figure 3 below presents the flow of the data collection process. CS represents Choral Speaking.

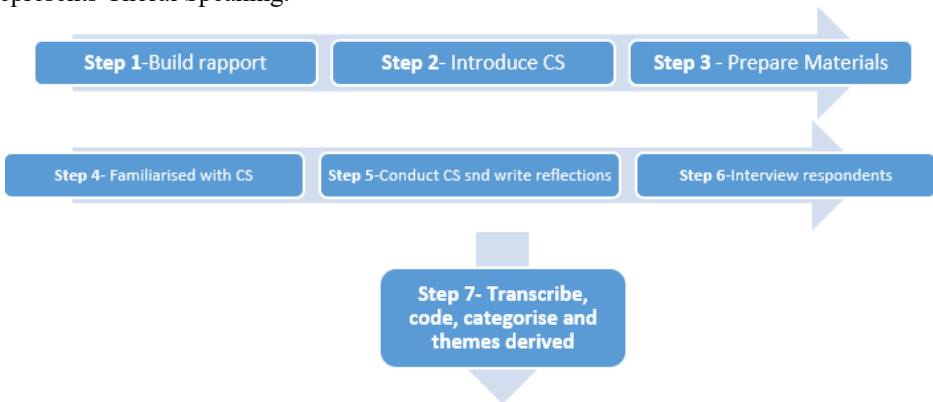


Figure 3: The Flow of Data Collection Procedure

The two primary sources of data used in this study were semi-structured interviews and students' reflections. Four postgraduate students volunteered to participate in this study, and all of them are international postgraduate students. The researchers acted as facilitators and middlemen for initial contact purposes. During the interview, the participants discussed their ideas and experiences regarding whether their service-learning experiences enhanced their multicultural knowledge. The data from the semi-structured interviews and reflective journals was thoroughly coded and categorised, and finally, themes were derived from this exercise.

The study aimed to identify whether service learning enhances students' multicultural awareness. In the same vein, examining the types of activities carried out that could help the participants raise awareness of the importance of multicultural understanding through choral speaking activities. The findings are presented and discussed based on themes derived and emerged from the analysed data analysed. The results are assessed in light of the study's research purpose, and the arguments are examined in light of the participants' experiences, interview excerpts, and the material presented at the outset.

A. Respondents' Insights on Cultural Identity Of Potential People They Will Be Working With Before The Service-Learning Project

Before the day of the event, students were given a list of the names of villagers from the target community with whom they would be interacting. Prior to their service learning projects, the participants revealed that they were both enthusiastic and anxious. However, many reported making stereotypical comments and cultural assumptions about the different individuals involved in the community initiatives before meeting them face-to-face. R2 mentioned:

'I'm a bit worried if the villagers cannot speak English and that I look different from them. I don't know if they know where South Africa is'. (R2: 79). While R4 said that perhaps the villagers would think that he is a Malaysian Indian. *"I think there are perks to having those thoughts. But still, I'm apprehensive. There are customs that we Indians from India practise that are different from the Indians you have in Malaysia'. (R4: 32).*

The participants' other thoughts regarding the various races before and after meeting individuals from those groups are summarised and displayed in Table 3 below. Specific conditions and arrangements, as well as questions eliciting identical replies, were modified. In comparison to some students at the university, the participants' sentiments towards the community in the village were more optimistic, based on the interview. On the other hand, participants reported several negative attitudes or prejudices regarding people living in the target area. Notably, most negative stereotypes and apprehensions were held towards the kind of attitude of the village people towards international students. There were evident behavioural indications of excitement, curiosity, surprise, and delight throughout the interview. Their participation was lively, engaging, and frequently humorous.

Respondents' Apprehension Towards the Service-Learning Project

All four respondents were sceptical about meeting the people in the village at the beginning. R1 was worried about the cultural practices of the villagers and whether they were totally different from hers. While R2, R3, and R4 expressed their apprehension, stating their uneasiness and anxiety. R4 (from India) mentioned that he was worried that the villagers might not understand his thick Indian accent. The rest demonstrated their concern related to the locals' fixed mindset towards international students. However, those were some thoughts they had before meeting and communicating with the villagers. In their journals, all four stated that they were quick to stereotype the villagers, not knowing what to expect. They agreed that the villagers were welcoming, warm, and kind hearted people. Wu et al. (2015) confirmed that intercultural knowledge is pertinent for both local and international audiences. They said:

...the lack of intercultural communication causes anxiety to interact with people from different groups. When people have anxiety to interact with people from different cultures, they will create a negative stereotype concerning the behaviour of newcomers (p.3).

Table 3: Respondents’ Views Of The Cultures/Practices Of The Community

Indonesian	South African	Filipino	Indian
Before service-learning project			
Worried	Quite uneasy	Anxiety is high	Uneasy
<i>Maybe similar to my culture</i>	<i>I can learn new customs</i>	<i>I want to know their cultural practices</i>	<i>Maybe it something I’m accustomed to</i>
<u>Fear of the unknown</u> <i>What if I want to use their toilet? Would they allow?</i>	<u>Dissatisfaction and disappointment</u> <i>What if they don’t like me, I will be sad.</i>	<u>Fixed mindset about someone</u> <i>They may have heard many negative things about my country.</i>	<u>Stereotyping</u> <i>My accent is too thick. They won’t understand me.</i>
After service-learning project			
<u>Concrete Experience</u> <i>I didn’t know that the parents of the children would be there every time we had our practices. I guess that is the norm here.</i>	<u>Increased Confidence</u> <i>Before this project, I was a tad unconfident with myself, my ability. Hey, who would have thought, I did it!</i>	<u>Improved engagement</u> <i>After the second meeting, I think we were able to communicate with the family members of the children better, and the children also tried to learn our languages.</i>	<u>Accommodation and Self-Reflection</u> <i>The villages, although weary of us, they accommodated our project, gave their utmost help. I thanked each and every one of them at the end of the project.</i>

The Extent to Which Service-Learning Shaped Students’ Understanding Of Cultural Diversity

Below are some of the points given by the respondents through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals on the benefits of service-learning to them.

- Sense of empowerment leading to improved self-esteem (R1)
- "I enjoyed being a part of the project. I don't have to read and remember all the textbooks and confusing terms. I just need to write about what I learned from the service-learning projects. (R2)
- "I liked being a part of the project as a whole. Working with people of different ages in the community helped me improve at being a leader and talking to people. Also, when we met people from different backgrounds, we became more open-minded, and I know that my view of other cultures changed." (R2: E4)
- "Yes, service learning brings learning to life! Indeed, experience is the best teacher. It changed how I thought about many things and helped me become a better person. (R3)
- "Yes, we teach the kids things, but they also teach us things about life and culture, and I think that is more important." (R4)
- No matter how much book smarts you have, in my opinion, they won't help you much until you can apply them to real-world situations. It appears that service

learning will help me hone my abilities in this... if I can use the material in my life or see examples in it, it motivates me to want to study more." (R2: E4)

- "I believe that everyone has a responsibility to work towards improving their community. Whether they create a fundraiser, a homeless shelter, or something as simple as picking up trash, it all has an impact on our world (their) (R1:E2)
- "This project did not only go beyond my expectations but also made me think about similar things I can do with my own community"(R3)

The students made statements consistent with their altered attitudes and increased cultural understanding of diverse groups. Their service-learning activities prompted them to engage in self-reflection. They acknowledged that the service-learning project enhanced their understanding of the composition and culture of the community they often heard about but had no direct contact with, in that it allowed them to connect what they learned in class to their real-world experiences. 'Hands-on methods enable me to study more thoroughly... I will be able to become more involved in my community by using the service-learning opportunity to benefit myself and perhaps my family' (R3: E4)

The findings clearly showed that students enjoyed learning to understand others' cultures through service-learning pedagogy much more than in a classroom where knowledge is expected to flow successfully from teachers to students without any real-world experience or lasting impact. For instance, R2 said that 'I had never expected that the villagers would have a welcoming session with us and prepare all kinds of foods that I had never seen. I tasted them all, and I felt so appreciated' (R2: 65).

Through service learning, participants increased their knowledge, soft skills, and perceptions of individuals from various cultures. Additionally, the respondents were more empathetic towards the children who never had the chance to experience choral speaking. They were satisfied by the experiences, and they wanted to be part of more of such projects, even after graduating, just as mentioned by Jacoby & Howard (2014), Warren (2012), and Celio et al. (2011) that service learning enhances cultural and racial awareness and diminishes stereotypical thinking. Jacoby and Howard (2014) further stated that students who engage in service learning have the opportunity to experience and act on the issues individuals and communities confront. The participants in this study shared that they appreciated the relevance of course content to real-world situations and that they were able to understand the community better.

The areas in which the respondents feel service-learning has offered the most benefits and has truly had a positive impact include: production, intercultural exchange, and the transfer of knowledge and information about the university to the villagers. Cogswell (2001) stated:

Traditional forms of education measure student retention by a students' ability to recall information. Service learning, however, provides an educational opportunity that encourages students to participate in every aspect of "thinking". This includes categorizing, translating, hypothesizing, valuing, generalizing, and synthesizing information. (p.79)

Kolb's (1979) experiential learning model, which consists of four iterative stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, was clearly practiced in the students' service-learning project. They underwent the experiences of teaching children in the community the art of choral speaking, learning the customs and practices of the people in the community, and trying to

internalise cultural practices that are alien to them. Finally, they reflected on that experience via journal writing.

This current study has shed light on various ways in which higher education institutions are interested in connecting service-learning projects with cultural diversity. However, the instructors or teachers must have the will, creativity, and, most importantly, imagination to ensure service-learning benefits students as well as the community receiving the service.

DISCUSSION

This study has identified the extent to which service-learning may boost students' multicultural awareness. Four students participated in service-learning projects and uncovered fragments of evidence supporting the usefulness of the service-learning methodology in enhancing students' multicultural knowledge. Choral Speaking activities with the children in the target community helped them understand family bonds among the community members.

The results of this study indicate that students developed an understanding of some of the cultural factors of the community members with whom they interacted. In addition to complementing existing research, their feedback revealed an awareness of the service-learning process and its connection to multicultural competency. Students displayed knowledge of service learning, eliminating stereotypes, and fostering multicultural competence. Most importantly, they confirmed that their knowledge of culture is somehow expanded through this service-learning project.

Service learning, therefore, offers a wholesome opportunity for students to gain the intellectual tools they need to understand our changing environment as well as the self-reflective and analytical abilities necessary to begin behavioural changes. Inasmuch as these attributes may lead to an environmentally friendly citizen who is not only knowledgeable about environmental issues but also applies this knowledge to everyday life and everyday actions.

A greater understanding of the material and the acquisition of skills for applicable vocations result from the incorporation of service-learning. It has been concluded that service-learning is a student-centred approach through which students obtain a comprehensive and deeper comprehension of the subject matter, and, more significantly, how it is related to and can be applied to real-world problems (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Taggart & Crisp, 2011; Elwell & Bean, 2001; Prentice & Garcia, 2000; Sass & Coll, 2014).

The current study sought to determine whether service learning enhances students' multicultural awareness. Researchers were able to identify, investigate, and analyse the viewpoints of four international postgraduate students who participated in a service-learning project using two primary sources of data: semi-structured interviews and students' reflections. According to the study's findings, the service-learning project benefits the students greatly. Service learning broadens students' understanding of the value of community service, diversity, social skills, and the recognition that academic work has real-world implications. The process was investigated retrospectively as opposed to in real-time, and just one mode of data collection was employed (interview). It is recommended that future research should investigate multicultural competence development throughout service learning to comprehend varied individual experiences, ideas, and emotions before,

during, and after service-learning experiences. Future research should also employ multiple data sources to acquire a more in-depth understanding of this process. In addition, this study should be expanded to include a larger sample of individuals to assess its validity and reliability. As the number of samples increases, the study's findings should be explored more thoroughly and reliably, which may lead to a better research design. However, we are confident that, given the numerous benefits discovered in this study, the service-learning program will continue to influence educational institutions, local and international students, as well as communities in both urban and rural areas in the long run if such an activity is carried out consistently. In such a fast-paced environment, the value of extending a helping hand and providing assistance to others can be a motivating factor for individuals to recognise their position in society. Further research on the same paradigm can assist educators and administrators in making service programs an obligatory part of their curriculum, not just at the tertiary level, but also at the school level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to the International Islamic University Malaysia for the support given in completing this research.

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