

The Impacts of Experiential Learning and Volunteer Motivation on Service-Learning Outcomes in Business Education

Abstract

Numerous universities and educational institutions advocate service-learning (SL), a type of experiential learning approach, as a high-impact pedagogy. However, some educators question whether the effort on SL is successful in higher education. The nature of “mandatory volunteerism” in SL courses may exert undesirable effects in student learning outcomes. Additionally, students may perceive the level of experiential learning differently due to individual differences on learning strategy. This research investigates the effects of how students perceive experiential learning and volunteer motivation in SL courses on student learning outcomes including career, academic, personal growth, and civic responsibility.

Empirical research was conducted to survey business undergraduates enrolled in marketing SL courses. A total of 133 undergraduates voluntarily participated in this research. This study adopted multiple-item measures. The measurement scales included the four stages of experiential learning (Young et al., 2008), four service-learning outcomes (Geringer et al., 2009), the volunteer function inventory (Clary et al., 1998), and demographic variables. The scale validity of each construct had been tested and was considered appropriate.

This study found that both volunteer motivation and experiential learning play important roles for the success of SL pedagogy. The results support the main effects of volunteer motivation. Students who have a high level of volunteer motivation report more favorable SL learning outcomes than those who have a low level of volunteer motivation. There are main effects of experiential learning in SL courses on student learning outcomes. Students who perceive a high level of experiential learning toward a SL course report more favorable learning outcomes on career, academic, personal growth, and civic responsibility than those who perceive a low level of experiential learning. Regarding student volunteer motivation, when a SL course is designed well for students to perceive a high level of experiential learning, this study demonstrated that the students’ learning outcomes can be significantly enhanced or improved.

The feature of “required volunteerism” in SL courses negatively impact on business undergraduates only who have low volunteer motivation and perceive low-level experiential learning courses. To capitalize the benefits of SL pedagogy, a high-level experiential learning course is a must. Institutions in higher education should not only promote SL pedagogy, but also assist faculty in developing high-level experiential learning courses.