



Does Service Learning Have An Impact on Students' Attitude toward Community Service, Enhance The Virtue of Responsibility, and Contribute to The Common Good? - A Pilot Test

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Introduction

After the devastation caused by the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the fire in its aftermath on January 17, 1995, volunteers from all over Japan, including many university students, gathered in the affected areas to help the victims. It was one piece of evidence among many to suggest that young Japanese people have become increasingly aware of the importance of such activities in recent years. But opportunities for volunteering do not only occur at times of extraordinary events like natural disasters; they can be found in everyday situations too, as for example when visiting nursing homes, feeding people in need, or sweeping and weeding the streets in one's neighborhood.

In Japanese higher education, volunteering has become an important part of the curriculum in many institutions; since the Great Hanshin Earthquake universities have been giving credits to students who devote their time to volunteer activities. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology is actively encouraging universities to give credits to student volunteers, to establish volunteer activity centers on campuses to facilitate student volunteering, and to integrate service learning programs into the curriculum to equip students with the skills and knowledge they will need if they are to work effectively in their local community or in an international setting, and so learn the importance of transformative education.

In the discussion and practice of service learning and volunteering by college students, the virtues, especially that of responsibility, play an important role. Indeed, during their four years at university, students can be transformed and grow morally through socially participatory programs, cultivating particular moral virtues and so improving their moral character; such activities during their college days give them ample opportunities to nurture, cultivate and enhance communication skills, social awareness, and virtues such as social responsibility, respect and benevolence, thus contributing to the common good.

At my small, private Japanese university, which offers a service-learning program to its students, I have been conducting empirical research on the impact of service-learning on their attitudes to community service and to the virtue of social responsibility, attempting to measure the impact of service learning on students' attitudes in the following three areas: community service, the virtue of responsibility, and the common good.

To assess the impact of community service on student's attitude, I employed the Community Service Attitude Scale (Shiarella et al. 2000) questions to measure such items as Awareness, Connectedness, Normative helping behavior, Seriousness, and Intentions towards community service.

To assess the impact on the virtue of responsibility, I focused on two different meanings of the term 'responsibility' for which there are measurement scales: the first is a preparedness to fulfil one's role and duties in general; the second is the readiness to admit and accept the consequences of one's deeds.

My research project was also designed to measure how service learning impacts students' awareness of the common good (including the protection of the environment, the prevention of global warming, the enhancement of voting behavior, and a concern for national security) and engenders in them a positive attitude towards it.

Measuring the Effects of Service Learning

The Challenges Involved in Measuring these Effects

Although service learning is becoming more popular in American higher education, the extant literature reveals several difficulties involved in measuring the potential gains for students participating in service learning program. The following four issues are particularly important.

The first is the short duration of such programs. One of the most popular types of such programs

involves a service learning component being “added onto” an existing class so that students are required to attend a semester long (or sometimes shorter) program for few hours a week during that period of time (Tyron et al., 2008: 16). When the exposure to the service learning experience is limited it is difficult to provide a deep experience that can transform students’ attitude.

Secondly, a review of the literature on service learning suggests that it has had mixed results in terms of its moral impact on students. One survey, for example, noted that while the scores measuring the moral development of students participating in service learning programs did not change, the students themselves reported that they had become more positive, more compassionate and sensitive toward others, more motivated to solve social problems, and more concerned to improve the condition of the world (Bernacki and Jaeger, 2008: 5; Brandes and Randall, 2011: 27).

Previous studies have highlighted, thirdly, the need for a more rigorous approach to research design, including the incorporation, for example, of pre-test and post-test, control groups, and the use of multi-item scales among others (Bingle et al., 2004: 25). At least one attempt has been made to conduct pre- and post-test assessments of positive outcomes assessing civic responsibility, to control potentially confounding variables, to address service learning projects selected by student groups themselves, and to employ multi-item scales (Brandes and Randall, 2011: 21). The need to utilize different paradigms to measure and understand the impact of service learning and its influences on students’ values or moral attitudes has also been underscored (Shumer, 2000).

The final issue is the importance of deepening our understanding of the role that service learning plays, particularly in terms of students’ interest in the quality of service learning activities. Morton (1995: 29) proposed charity, project, and social change as paradigms that may eventually transform the individuals and the communities, since they “suggest different ways of defining issues and understanding change over time.” Teachers need to recognize these differences and teach appropriately, so Morton suggested that they take time to outline fully to students “the range of service that exists” so that students can expand their views on what service is. This can also help to prevent mismatches between the type of service learning program offered and what students find interesting or meaningful.

Research Design

Hypothesis

Tyron et al. (2008) noted many of the problems associated with short-term service learning courses. Reitaku University in Japan, where I conducted my research, exemplifies a number of them, since it offers just one service learning course, a class that meets only for 90 minutes once a week during in a 15 week semester. The class instructor disclosed to me that such a limited time frame means that not much can be done to provide opportunities for students to change their attitudes through a service learning experience. Brandes and Randall (2011: 22-3) have also analyzed several of the shortcomings of such programs: firstly, since classes in service learning courses typically tends to be small in size, and since the time available for change to occur is limited to one semester (usually four months), detecting a statistically significant change in terms of an effective transformation in students’ attitude is difficult; secondly, longitudinal follow-up assessments of the ongoing effects of such courses are not often conducted, and so researchers can only evaluate service learning education twice, by giving pre- and post-tests during the semester when the course is offered; thirdly, the type of outcome assessed will also affect the ability of any study to measure significant differences over a short time frame; finally, one must include theoretically and empirically important covariates or statistical controls to maximize a study’s power to detect change.

The study presented her faced many of these difficulties and limitations. Of the 49 students in the class who took the pre-test in the first semester (which began in April and ended in August 2017), the responses of only 35 provided valid data¹. The pre-test was administered on July 15. A post-test was given on November 24 to just nine students (since they were the only ones to participate in service learning activities during the summer break following the semester in which they took the course), during the second semester

¹ Students were asked if they had answered the questions honestly, and questionnaires where respondents marked 6 or lower in the verbal anchor 7, or where they failed to answer one question, were discarded.

that started in September and will end in January, 2018. The research hypothesis was that students' scores in three areas of measurement (Community Service Attitudes Scale, the virtue of Responsibility, and their sense of the Common Good) would increase after their involvement in voluntary, civic activities, i.e., between the pre- and post-tests. In order to compensate for the shortcomings of the post-test due to the small sample size, an in-depth interview was conducted with those who had participated in the volunteer activities.

Research Questions

Based on the hypothesis outlined above, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1: Does service learning have an impact on students' attitude toward community service?

RQ 2: Does service learning have an impact on students' virtue of responsibility?

RQ 3: Does service learning have an impact on students' sense of the common good, i.e. environmental protection, the enhancement of voting behavior, and awareness of national security?

Methodology

Participants

49 undergraduate students at Reitaku University in Kashiwa City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan, who were enrolled in the Service Learning Program taught by Professor Ritsu Fuyutsuki in the first semester were assessed in the July 15 pre-test. After a series of lectures the students were asked by the instructor to look into possible voluntary opportunities by themselves, to identify one volunteer activity they wanted to undertake during the summer break from early August through late September, and to make the necessary arrangements to do so. The final sample for analysis consisted of 7 males and 29 females (36 in total), ranging in age from 18 to 20 (30 bring freshmen, 3 sophomores, and 3 juniors). 16 had previously engaged in volunteer activities and 20 had not.

In the second semester, however, only nine students who had taken part in volunteer activities during the summer recess answered the questionnaire. The post-test was given to these students to assess changes in their attitudes in the wake of these civic activities. The final sample for analysis consisted of 2 males and 7 females, ranging in age from 18 to 20 (8 freshmen and 1 sophomore).

Measurement Techniques

The Community Service Attitudes Scale (CSAS)

The Community Service Attitudes Scale (Shiarella et al., 2000), which measures university students' attitudes in respect of community service, is based on S. H. Schwartz' model of altruistic helping behavior. It identifies eight sequential steps in a helping action in four phases: (1) activation steps (awareness of need, actions to relieve need, ability to provide help, sense of connectedness); (2) the obligation step (empathy), or the moral obligation to respond; (3) defense steps (costs and benefits, seriousness of need and responsibility to respond); and (4) the response step (intention) for engagement in helping behavior. But to make the survey less complicated and thus more manageable, this list was modified, with the defense steps in Schwartz's model being excluded. Instead the questionnaire addressed the defense steps in the form of open-ended question.

The present study therefore focused on: (1) awareness, a measure of the respondents' perceived awareness of community needs; (2) connectedness, a measure of their perceived connectedness to their community; (3) moral obligation, a measure of their perceived personal or situational moral obligation to help their community; and (4) intentions in terms of community service, a measure of their intention to help their community.

Based on the above definitions, and adapting and modifying Bringle et al. (2004) and Coe et al. (2014), the survey included questionnaire items for CSAS (see Appendix 1). Based on the CSAS a scale of 7 was created: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = rather agree, and 7 = strongly agree. One example of a question asked was, "I feel bad that some community members are suffering from a lack of resources." Cronbach's alpha, a widely used assessment of the internal-consistency reliability of a scale, was 0.7673 for this scale for the pre-test, and

0.8591 (>0.7) for the post-test.

The Virtue of Responsibility

The virtue of Responsibility is defined as “an attitude in which we perceive our role and the duties tied to that role,” a duty for which people are held accountable to themselves, their family members, their neighborhood and local community, their school and workplace, and their country (Ryan et al., 2011: 197). It consists of: 1) responsibility to oneself, being accountable for maintaining and managing one’s health or enhancing one’s ability and skills, increasing one’s knowledge; 2) responsibility to one’s family members, understanding and fulfilling one’s duties and roles for the family members, and passing on traditional values from generation to generation; 3) responsibility to one’s neighborhood and local community, paying attention to the needs of the local community and thus fulfilling one’s duties as a citizen; 4) responsibility in school and the workplace, i.e. working loyally, diligently, and honestly; and 5) responsibility to one’s country, by paying respect to the head of state and performing one’s duties as a citizen.

A scale of 7 was created: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = rather agree, and 7 = strongly agree. One example of a question asked was, “I assume responsibility for my words and behavior.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.7539 for this scale at pre-test and 0.8557 (>0.7) at post-test.

The Environment as a Common Good

The virtue of responsibility is partly personal and partly public. As Brian Treanor (2010: 13) notes, it is difficult to distinguish personal from public virtue because human beings are social beings. The definition of responsibility offered above (a duty for which people are held accountable to themselves, their family members, their neighborhood and local community, their school and workplace, and their country) indicates that the virtue of responsibility is partly personal and partly public. Responsibility as a private virtue contributes primarily “to individual well-being,” while as a public virtue it contributes primarily “to the well-being of the community.”

Environmental problems, detrimental to the health of a community, are the result of the collective action of individual human beings. According to Mercedes Pardo et al. (2003: 68), the “increasing importance of environmental values” is one of the social factors which support the interpretation of the environment as a “common good of human society.” The destruction and alteration of environment exemplify common human behavior towards nature, transforming an ecosystem into a more economically productive system. Environmental concern occurs when a society starts valuing nature in a positive manner in order to preserve it for succeeding generations to use and enjoy (Mercedes 2003: 73).

A scale of 7 was created: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = rather agree, and 7 = strongly agree. One example of a question asked was, “I assume responsibility for protecting natural environment of the planet Earth.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.8112 for this scale at pre-test and 0.9369 (>0.7) at post-test.

The Nation as a Common Good

The previous section argued that the well-being of a community primarily hinges upon a healthy environment and ecosystem. Economic stability is also extremely important to guarantee the soundness of a community. But national security or national political stability seems to be even more essential for that purpose than economic strength, since economic growth cannot be achieved while national security is threatened or jeopardized by domestic political unrest or military aggression by neighboring countries.

Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* can be read as identifying national security as a common good (interest), as in the following passage; “For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states.” (Aristotle 1925) Aristotle argues here that if one attains something for the nation, it is by far a greater thing than doing it for oneself, because the achievement can positively affect and profit the members of the

nation that protects them.

A scale of 7 was set up: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither disagree nor agree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = rather agree, and 7 = strongly agree. One example of a question asked was, “Nothing is more important than the national security.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.8207 for this scale at pre-test and 0.7353 (>0.7) at post-test.

Results

Statistical Data

BellCurve Excel Statistics version 2.14 was used to conduct repeated measurements ANCOVA (SCSA at Pre-test and Post-test) with covariates (pre-test student year in school, and previous experience and non-experience of service learning and volunteer activities). Male-female was used as a dummy variable. The hypothesis was that participating students would increase their awareness, intention, seriousness, connectedness as measured by the Community Service Attitudes Scale, responsibility, sense of Environment as a Common Good, and that of the Nation as a Common Good.

Descriptive statistics and zero correlations for all study variables both at Pre-test and Post-test are provided in Tables 1 and 2. Minor changes in the mean levels of the dependent or outcome variables were observed between those who had never had service learning and volunteer experiences (1.1290) and those who had had service learning and volunteer experiences (1.5143) by 0.3853, and those between the Nation as a Common Good (NCG) at pre-test (32.629) and NCG at the post-test (33.333) by 0.704 (as shown in the Table 1).

The hypothesis about overall mean or aggregate change in student participants’ CSAS, sense of Responsibility, ECG and NCG was not proved by the repeated measurements analyses with covariates. The breakdowns of CSAS are shown in the Table 2. None of the dependent variables show any observable change in mean levels. With regards to the Responsibility, EDG and NCG, as shown in the Table 3, the significant differences found in the repeated measures test were the variables of ECG Pre-T and Non-SL Experience Pre-T ($p=0.02^*$), ECG Pre-T and SCSA Pre-T ($p=0.02^*$), NCG Pre-T and School year (0.005^{**}), NCG Pre-T and SL Experience Pre-T (0.004^{**}), NCG Pre-T and SCSA Pre-T (0.02^*), and NCG Post-T and SL Experience Pre-T (0.004^{**}) only. Except for the above, most of the variables tested did not show significant differences, and consistent with previous empirical work on small samples, the repeated measures ANCOVA tests failed to reach statistical significance.

Multiple regression analysis with all the variables was also conducted and a significant causal relationship between Nation as Common Good Post-test and Previous Service Learning Experience inside and outside the classroom was found ($f=11.1098$, $p=0.0169^*$). It seems that students with greater experience in serving the community are more inclined to be aware of the importance of the national defense or civic responsibilities such as positive voting behavior.

Table 1

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
No-Previous SL Pre-T	1.129	0.341	1	2	-
Previous SL Pre-T	1.548	0.506	1	2	-
SCSA Pre-T	99.143	15.399	70	123	0.7673
SCSA Post-T	95.667	13.684	78	120	0.8591
Responsibility Pre-T	46	6.376	25	55	0.7539
Responsibility Post-T	45.222	7.085	29	53	0.8557
Environment Pre-T	42.943	8.575	26	56	0.812
Environment Post-T	42.111	10.752	28	54	0.9369
Nation Pre-T	32.629	8.2	17	49	0.8207
Nation Post-T	33.333	5.59	26	42	0.7353

Table 2

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
Awareness Pre-T	16.429	3.146	10	21	0.7075
Awareness Post-T	16.111	3.333	11	21	0.7537
Seriousness Pre-T	10.743	1.975	7	14	0.5056
Seriousness Post-T	9.778	1.787	7	12	0.2609
Intention Pre-T	11.857	2.088	8	14	0.5665
Intention Post-T	10.778	2.279	8	14	0.9305
Connectedness Pre-T	29.086	7.346	14	42	0.8581
Connectedness Post-T	28.444	3.395	25	34	0.8299

Table 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 School year	-										
2 SL experience: Pre-T	0.40	-									
3 Non SL experience: Pre-T	0.87	0.65	-								
4 SCSA: Pre-T	0.42	0.52	0.59	-							
5 SCSA: Post-T	0.32	0.28	0.23	0.17	-						
6 Responsibility: Pre-T	0.32	0.43	0.69	0.69	0.96	-					
7 Responsibility: Post-T	0.39	0.79	0.31	0.96	0.34	0.34	-				
8 Environment CG: Pre-T	0.80	0.84	0.02*	0.02*	0.16	0.27	0.93	-			
9 Environment CG: Post-T	0.40	0.79	0.33	0.42	0.44	0.44	0.26	0.87	-		
10 Nation CG: Pre-T	0.005**	0.004**	0.38	0.02*	0.14	0.30	0.10	0.42	▲	-	
11 Nation CG: Post-T	0.90	0.004**	0.10	0.12	0.14	0.14	0.65	0.33	▲	0.18	-

Open-ended Question and Interview Data

Open-ended question Data in the pre-test

The following questions were asked: (1) What do you want to learn from service learning activities inside and outside the classroom? (2) What kind of impact will taking part in the service learning activities have on your future job? (3) What kind of influence will giving up your time to serve the community have on you as a human being? (4) Volunteering and serving to communities take up your precious time. What do you think about this?

We selected 4 students out of the 9 who answered the post-test, which was administered on November 24, for interview sessions. The following data comes from responses to the open-ended question (1) above.

(1) The first respondent said she wanted to feel warmth from people in the community through exchanges in the local area, and learn about the nature of volunteer activities. The second wrote that he wanted to learn about people’s response to others’ negative and positive activities. The third respondent said he wanted to utilize the experience for his future career. The fourth one wrote that she wished to learn how to cooperate in the volunteer group and how to socialize herself.

(2) All four respondents thought it was a positive thing to spend time for others’ wellbeing and for their own future through service to the community. One male respondent wrote that he wished to do volunteer activities in the future, therefore he believed he would spend his time for service to other people.

(3) All four said that they believed that service learning would encourage them in their own lives, that they could learn about other people, obtain self-knowledge and awareness they had never had, and above all that they could grow as human beings.

(4) All said they did not regret spending their time for other people, since this, they felt, would give them self-confidence. They would enjoy the time spent for other people, and had themselves chosen to take part in volunteer activities out of genuine desire.

Interview Data

As noted, the interviews with the 4 students² asked about their volunteer experiences, including their reasons for taking the service learning class, and the nature of the activities involved in their chosen area of service. The interviews were conducted in my office and each lasted approximately 30 minutes.

One student, a freshman, had been involved in volunteer activities since April this year. He takes part in an program organized by a non-profit group for young people to walk long distances together. He likes children and young people involved in outdoor activities. Every other weekend he goes to a meeting held at various places in the Tokyo metropolitan area and engages in preparation activities for the events. On each occasion he gives up half a day, including time travelling back and forth from his residence to the meeting place. He said that at the beginning he was excited and hoped to help young people walk a long distance, but that after a couple of months he became less enthusiastic about the group. He disclosed at the time of the pre-test in July that he was still not used to the volunteer group and still felt some excitement and high expectation before and during the event; therefore he scored this highly in the questionnaire. After his participation in the summer event, which took his time and energy, and revealed the reality of volunteer activity, he was almost disenchanted with the group and the event it organized. He said he might have marked the score here lower in the post-test questionnaire.

The other male participant in the service learning program, a sophomore, has been involved PLAS+, an extracurricular program in which students visit Nepal to undertake earthquake relief activities and Cambodia as traffic education volunteers. This student visited Cambodia last year for traffic education. The playground of an elementary school in a suburban area had been used as a short cut by local people riding motorcycles or driving small cars. There was no sturdy wall or fence around it to prevent them from unlawfully crossing the playground for their own convenience. So the student helped to raise money to build a wall around the playground and also taught the school children how to avoid the vehicles trespassing into the playground. In addition to his involvement in Cambodia, he is currently interested in food loss and waste reduction activities, and hopes to establish his own volunteer group to help tackle this world-wide problem. He has recently launched a new PLAS+ program in the area of food waste in the Philippines, which he visited last summer to investigate the possibility of starting a program on Cebu Island.

Discussion

Let us return to our research questions: RQ 1: Does service learning have an impact on students' attitude toward community service? RQ 2: Does service learning have an impact on students' virtue of responsibility? RQ 3: Does service learning have an impact on students' sense of common good, i.e. environmental protection, enhancement of voting behavior, and awareness of national security?

The results outlined above showed that service learning did not have a significant impact on the respondents' attitude toward community service. Despite all these negative effects, those participating in service learning did show a certain change in mean levels after experiencing more community service. Regarding the relatively lower levels of the post-test results as against the pre-test ones, as the interview data indicated, the high expectations about volunteer activity at the time of pre-test could have enhanced the mean, while the reality of such activity might have caused the participants to lower them.

In respect of the virtue of responsibility, the data did not reveal any significant change. The questionnaire items can be divided into three groups: responsibility to the family and at home; responsibility at school; and responsibility in general. For the first of these, Cronbach's alpha was 0.4452 at the time of pre-test and 0.7847 at the post-test; for the second, the results were 0.5306 and 0.6953; only for the third category were the alpha values higher both at the pre-test: 0.7539 and at the post-test: 0.8081. Therefore the current study did not indicate that service learning activities inside and outside the classroom had had any significant influence on the students' virtue of responsibility.

Two kinds of common good variables were outlined above: the Environment as Common Good; and the Nation as a Common Good. The ECG variable (ECG Pre-test) showed slight differences as opposed to the Non-Service Learning Experience Pre-test and the SCSA Pre-test, but these were not statistically significant.

² Here we focus on two male students because the two female students, who were not actively involved in service learning activities, did not provide any significant information during their interviews..

Service learning experiences may fairly be said not to have had a significant impact on students' sense of ECG.

NCG, on the other hand, seems to be the only variable where a co-relationship with other variables has been detected so far. In terms of mean levels, apart from the service learning experience variable, NCG was the only variable to increase at the post-test. The post-test was conducted on November 24 at a time when President Trump's visit to Japan, Korea and China precipitated the North Korean possible aggression against the US and Japan. A mood of impending crisis caused by North Korea's nuclear weapons production and missile launches may have made Japanese young people think about national security, causing the NCG to increase by 0.704.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, there is a positive causal relationship between service learning experiences and NCG revealed by the multiple regression analysis. Statistically significant results with the variables NCG Pre-test and NCG Post-test and service learning were also obtained (see Table 2). Hence it may be possible to say that service learning experiences might have caused an increase in the sense of Nation as Common Good among the participants.

In conclusion, three defects of this current study should be mentioned. Firstly, the samples for the post-test were insufficient in number. To address this shortcoming, data from service learning classes and non-service learning classes in other universities could be obtained to supplement what has been obtained at Reitaku. Secondly, since the time span for the service learning course is limited to one or two semesters at most, which limits the opportunity to observe possible changes in students' attitude, attempts need to be made to improve the research environment here. Thirdly, the methodology employed in this research involved self-reports and interviews, which means that the results presented here may suffer from bias and a lack of objectivity. Here we face what Kristján Kristjánsson calls "the profoundest problem." As he suggests in his *Aristotelian Character Education*, "a proper instrument to measure virtue" is needed, one that is eclectic, and which employs mixed methods including self-reports, other-reports and dilemma tests (Kristjánsson 2015: 84). Given the object of this research undertaking, adopting such mixed methods constitute our best option for future endeavors.

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