

The Impact of Community Service Learning in the success of Entrepreneurship students

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Abstract

The Small Business Management qualification had been the last resort not a first choice for many students to study, for two years students were surveyed, 50% indicated that it is their first choice but 30% chose it since other qualifications were full and further 10% indicated that their parents told them to do it. Therefore the qualification in 2008-2012 suffered from incubating high risk students and with 45% throughput rate. Service learning was introduced and its impact has been measured using the mixed method. The results indicate high academic performance and personal growth, success rate increased by 40% since the implementation. More than 50% of the students graduated within 3 years of enrolment compared to less than 20% in 2008-2013 where service learning was not implemented. One of the main goals at University of Johannesburg is that at least 10% of all academic programmes incorporate service learning efficiently & cost-effectively in their curricula by 2020, from the current base of 4%.

Background

The **National Diploma in Small Business Management** (Entrepreneurship ENT22A2/ENT22B2) qualification has been seen as the last resort for many students to enter the university, who either cannot find space in other qualifications of their choice or who are not sure what to do. In the past two years students have been surveyed, by show of hands 50% of the students wanted to do the qualification but 30% could not get into other qualifications of their choices and this was the available qualification then the further 10% is usually students who are told by their parents to do the qualification. This is according to a brief survey conducted in class. Therefore the qualification in 2008-2012 suffered from incubating high risk students and with 45% throughput rate. Due to limited understanding of what it means to manage a small business, the qualification's importance has been marginalised by students and regarded as less important compared to other qualifications. In the past five years the programme lecturers have worked hard on making the qualification the best entrepreneurship programme in the country and hopefully eventually in the world. This has been achieved by introducing community service learning

and changing the name from small business management to entrepreneurship diploma or degree.

The failure by many graduates to find employment has been seen as one of the reasons why the programme has been remodeled to address the problems faced by our students when they graduate. Business advisory board members in the faculty raised their concern that most students when they graduate they are not work ready. The Entrepreneurship programme does not focus on producing job seekers but job creators. The focus is on enabling students to be business consultants, business owners, social entrepreneurs and academics. Finding companies to place interns has been the challenge over the past few years as the job market has been saturated by retrenchments and closures. Therefore the project tries to address the latter challenges by introducing community service learning. This project started in 2012 therefore it is about time an evaluation of its impact is undertake.

The low throughput rate in the National Diploma Small Business Management had impacted the performance of the whole faculty of management. The qualification had many at risk students who do not complete the qualification and had a high dropout rate. Students were not motivated to do this qualification and were regarded as an inferior. The perception was that the qualification enables you to manage insignificant businesses like tuckshops. That was not regarded as a prestigious profession. Students took longer to complete this qualification.

- Poor academic performance due to low entry requirements for the qualification.
- High drop -out rate
- Low throughput rate
- Low employability opportunities
- Many identified at risk students
- Poor articulation of the qualification for postgraduate studies.
- Low throughput rate in the qualification.

Aim/Purpose/Focus

Community service learning has been identified as the most effective tool to promote authentic learning in entrepreneurship since students do not get the opportunity to be employed as interns if they enrol for a small business management qualification. This is attributed to the fact that most qualifications are producing job seekers rather than job creators. Therefore if this pedagogical tool is implemented on full scale in other qualifications, it can result in students who have work experience on graduation. Therefore

investigating the impact and having previous students share their experiences could lead to a model that could be developed for guidance to new service learning practitioners.

Literature Review

The underpinning theory for this study is transformational learning. Transformative learning allows changes in the way the student understands self, due to new learning acquired the belief systems of the student is revised and finally changes in lifestyle will follow (Dewey, 1963) . A number of grade 12 learners are usually underprepared for university academic content. Therefore service learning speeds up the process of learning and make sure that they are conscious of the fact that they do not learn to pass an exam but to implement what they learned in a real life situation. For the purposes of this study the impact of service learning can be summarise into three constructs namely; academic performance, social responsibility and personal growth.

Academic performance is one of the major benefits of service learning, studies conducted by, (Kolb, 1984; Mayer, 2003; Mpofu, 2004; Raman & Pashupati, 2002) suggest that students learn best when engaged in co-constructing knowledge, testing received knowledge against real life experiences, challenging their own assumptions, and learning from and with civic involvement. Students enrolled in the medical aspects of disabilities course, performed the same when give a multiple choice assessment but when they were given a case study the students who were involved in community service learning performed better, since they have had the opportunity to engage with the real disable persons (Mpofu, 2007).

Students' retention is an academic priority since having new cohorts every year could turn out to be a costly exercise for the universities. Traditional methods of instruction can be effective (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1991), yet many educators seek additional methods to enhance student learning, expand educational objectives beyond knowledge acquisition, and promote student success. Service-learning has emerged as a pedagogy with great potential for enhancing personal growth, and civic growth (Ash et al., 2005).One of the most important outcomes that service-learning might have at the institutional level is creating a more engaged and active learning environment that contributes to the retention of students until degree completion (Bringle *et al*, 2010).

Methodology

The paradigm followed in this study was interpretivist since it started with a problem. A mixed method approach was more appropriate. The mixed method offset the weaknesses

of both quantitative and qualitative research by providing comprehensive evidence as being “practical” in the sense that the researcher is free to use all methods possible to address a research problem (Johnson et al. (2007: 123)

Both primary and secondary data was gathered. The results at this point are dominantly qualitative in nature since qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of the impact of service learning (Chrisnall, 2005:18).

Findings and Discussions

Academic performance has been the key motivator for implementing service learning and is to dominate the discussion of the findings. Since students were enrolled in the qualification for the wrong reasons up to 50% of the students did not proceed to the second year of study and more that 10% cancellations happened before the end of the first semester. The study shows a remarkable steady 75 to 92% pass rate (2012-2015) for the past four years since the implementations of service learning. The qualification has been enrolling about 120 students since 2008_2012 but the graduating students within three years have been in some cases less than twenty on yearly basis. It took longer for the students to complete the qualification an average of four to be exact. Because of the latter very less than 5% of the students were able to further their studies. Service learning has improves throughput rates and success rates by 30%. In 2016 more students graduated in record time compared to the other qualification in the department. This has proven to be the best measure of the impact of service learning since this qualifications used have the label of at-risk modules. Service learning has been used by a number students as their work experience in finding jobs or enrolling for postgraduate studies that require two years working experience. Students reported that they felt they were more work ready on completion of their qualifications since they had a lot interaction with real struggling business and say this has enable them tō handle work pressures. Problem solving ability has been the key quality they made them stand out above the rest.

Conclusion

Community Service Learning can be used in various disciplines enhance learning and student success. The challenges are the resources, competency of the educator and the time frames of the modules or courses. These factors if not monitored can hamper the progress of students and be seen as poor interventions compared to the traditional way. Community service learning focuses on quality instead of quantity because success in this intervention is measured in terms academic performance in the long term, social responsibility and personal growth. The most emphasis is on the students' development holistically and the student voice is not overlooked instead it is echoed in every part of the learning intervention. Students tend to learn various modules in isolation and don't usually see the bigger picture of how each one contributes to the qualification. The link from year 1 to 2 to 3 level of study should be clearly visible. Since service learning can be so impactful on students the content could be structured

in such a way that student get certification in each level of study. Service learning allows the content to be relevant and current. Therefore it has the potential to inform re-recirculation.

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