

Impact of Mandatory Service-Learning Course on Civic Attitudes and Skills: Case Study in Ecuador

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Abstract: This mixed-methods study examined the impact of a mandatory service-learning course on students' civic attitudes. The Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) developed by Moely, Mercer, Illustre, Miron and McFarland (2002) were used to conduct a pre and posttest with students who took the course. Qualitative data was also gathered from in-depth interviews. Quantitative data analysis revealed a significant change on Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills and on Political Awareness. Interviews further confirmed that students experienced a transformational learning process. The study presents a mandatory course model used in Ecuador that could be implemented in higher education institutions from similar contexts in Latin America.

Key-Words: CASQ, civic attitudes, skills questionnaire, civic engagement, experiential learning, transformational learning, interpersonal and problem solving skills. .

1. Introduction

While service-learning in higher education is widely used in the United States, countries in Latin America, such as Ecuador, are in the beginning stages of implementing this model. For the purpose of this study, the term service-learning will be defined as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts

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of service-learning” (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5). Students go through a continuous reflection process in order to analyze at a personal and theoretical level the implications of their service hours. The hyphen in service-learning refers to the connection between learning and the service hours since one cannot occur without the other and both are of equal importance. Service-learning involves reciprocity; therefore, students involved in service-learning work together with individuals in the community towards a common goal in an equal relationship where both are learning and benefiting from each other (Jacoby, 1996, Mintz & Hesser, 1996).

As suggested by Mintz and Hesser (1996) there are some principles that should be considered when developing service-learning programs such as: Determining detailed service and learning goals, establishing tasks that will be performed by all the parties involved, allowing monitoring and evaluation of service-learning experiences, and providing concrete opportunities for students to reflect upon their service experience. This paper will present the following: Overview of service-learning, a discussion on civic attitudes as they relate to service-learning, how service-learning has being applied in Latin America and around the world, a discussion of the methods, participants, quantitative and qualitative measures used, a description of the intervention implemented, an explanation of the data collection process, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, a discussion of the limitations, results by research questions and themes, and finally relevant conclusions that emerged from this research.

2. Service-Learning Processes and Outcomes

Service-learning is considered to be a type of experiential education. John Dewey originally discussed this type of learning in his model of experiential learning (Daynes & Longo, 2004, Itin, 1999, Manolis, 2011). College students involved in service-learning courses begin the experiential learning process by having a concrete experience, then reflecting upon the feelings or beliefs produced by the experience, deriving abstract concepts from the reflection process with the instructor’s guide, and finally implementing alternative actions or behaviors when presented with a new experience (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, Zhao & Parks, 1995). Consequently, students doing service-learning are in constant reflection with their teachers and peers based on their experience within the community (Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley & Colby, 1996).

Cress, Collier & Reitenauer (2005) reported that students need to be exposed to the challenges faced in society such as hunger and domestic violence so that they are capable of translating theory into practice. Students experience such exposure through participation in service-learning programs that involve work with a vulnerable population, and afterward engage in reflection about these issues in the academic component of the program.

This reflection process is pivotal for a successful service-learning program. As suggested by Beard and Wilson (2006), the professor's role is to promote reflection after learners have a concrete experience. In the classroom, professors can encourage critical reflection about service experiences through different strategies such as weighing evidence, seeking clarification, examining cause and effect, and employing hypothetical questions and summaries (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). When service-learning students are engaged in their reflection process and are able to have a concrete and direct experience with the community, then their service experience is more favorable (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp & Fisher, 2010). This means that not all of the service-learning experiences are going to positively influence learners; consequently, teachers must be aware of how to use experiential learning theory principles in service-learning.

Experiential learning has certain limitations since it “can be misleading if the information available is limited or incomplete” (Higgins, 2009, p. 48). This means that learning will occur through experience if the facts about a particular subject are understood before the experience occurs. For instance, if students are learning about illiteracy, they will need to understand the concept and implications before going out to the community to participate in a program related to reduce illiteracy.

Transformational learning overlaps considerably with experiential learning, particularly with service-learning. According to Mezirow's (1997) transformation theory of adult learning, learning is “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action” (p. 163). Mezirow (1997) identifies two domains of learning: instrumental learning, which involves task-oriented skills, and communicative learning, which includes developing one's own beliefs through reflection. In service-learning programs, learning occurs in both of these domains as students learn new practical skills, engage in communication with different populations, and reflect on what their experiences mean for their understanding of the world. Service-learning is related to transformational learning since it refers to the process by which individuals reflect about their particular points of view and are able to question them in order to transform their previous perspectives (Merriam, et al., 2007).

Moreover, the effectiveness of service-learning programs has been researched and positive and negative student outcomes for students have been found. In one study, students that participated in a service-learning course grew in their political awareness and diversity attitudes in just one semester (Simons & Cleary, 2006). In contrast, Levesque et al. (2010) found that service-learning students did not report higher levels of motivation or civic awareness when compared to students that were not engaged in a service-learning program. Students reported the level of involvement with the target population, and more contact with the target population was associated with a

more positive learning experience. Service-learning students reported a more positive learning climate in courses where components of discussions and reflection were used compared to those classes where an emphasis on discussion and reflection was not a priority (Levesque et al. 2010). A couple of factors were found to negatively impact students' civic attitudes in service-learning programs. One such factor is adult tokenism, where students are given little voice or autonomy in choosing their organization or in their work at the organization (Anglin, Johnson-Pynn & Johnson, 2012). Requiring students to complete a service-learning program was also found to negatively impact the civic attitudes of high school students, though this was not found to be the case with college students (Moely & Ilustre, 2011).

3. Civic Attitudes

One of the goals of service-learning programs in higher education is citizenship education (Jacoby, 1996). A major component of civic and democratic participation is the civic attitudes that each student possesses. A number of studies on the development of student civic attitudes exist in the current literature. Giles & Eyler (1994) connected commitment to civic action with a sense of social responsibility and personal efficacy, finding that participation in a community service lab increased these factors among college students. In a later study, the same authors found that in optional service-learning courses, students who elected to take these courses scored significantly higher on measures of civic attitudes and engagement than those who did not choose to take the courses, which has ramifications for impacts on student attitudes toward mandatory service-learning programs (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997).

4. Service-Learning in Latin America and Around the World

Service-learning in Latin America has been mainly utilized in school settings (Tapia, 2010). Ecuador is a country where 26% of the population makes less than \$2.57 on a daily basis (INEC, 2013). Ecuador's government adheres to the Buen Vivir framework, which holds that people must interact responsibly with the environment to live well. Under the current president who has held office since 2006, Ecuador has operated with a socialist political system where the government provides social services for the wellbeing of its citizens to decrease socioeconomic disparities (Vanhulst, 2015). Ecuador's government implemented a service-learning program with elementary school children called Solidarity Schools, Service-learning at the college level has not been widely adopted nor studied in Ecuador; however, there is an official governmental requirement of community engagement hours that all college students must complete before they graduate. Apart from the liberal arts

university where this study took place, universities in Ecuador have not adopted a service-learning model to fulfill this requirement.

Educational institutions in Latin America have been using different forms of civic engagement without always labeling them as service-learning; generally this has been the case because the academic component of service-learning was lacking (Tapia, 2004). The Ministry of Education in Argentina introduced the concept of service-learning in schools in 1997 with the Educación Solidaria program that, in addition to promoting service-learning experiences, also provides training for instructors about how to use this model. Higher education institutions in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina have implemented mandatory service hours for their students as part of their curriculum (Tapia, 2004).

In 2002, CLAYSS (Latin American Center for Solidary Service-Learning) was created in order to promote the service-learning model in Latin America. Various higher education institutions in Latin America receive training from this organization in order to implement this model within their institutions (CLAYSS, 2014). □In their study of higher education institutions in Colombia, Pineda-Baez et al. (2014) identified potential benefits of implementing the service-learning model in Colombian universities, including reduced dropout rates and increased motivation in students to transfer what they learned in the classroom back into the community. Another study in a private university in Mexico reported that students were engaged with the community toward the end of their college career though unengaged toward the beginning. However, service-learning and community engagement have been widely promoted as a central tenet of this university's philosophy (Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2012). A Catholic University in Chile has been using the service-learning model since 2004 and has had over 18,000 students complete a service-learning course. In their research on the effectiveness of this approach, the Chilean university found that service-learning allows students to receive an integral professional instruction, professors are able to change their teaching focus and center on the student, and community relations are enhanced (Jouannet, Salas & Contreras, 2013).

Higher education institutions around the world also implement the service-learning model within their curriculum. A public university in Spain implemented a service-learning course with 162 students in order to work in different projects that worked on diversity, environment, equality, and citizenship. Students were able to choose the project they worked on during the duration of the course and were highly motivated during the implementation phase of the project and demonstrated to be able to critically reflect upon their experiences (Amat & Miravet, 2010). Another University in Spain implemented service-learning with a group of students that used graffiti as a means to create a connection with the community and its social needs (Algado, Portet & Vela, 2013).

The impact of a mandatory service-learning course was previously studied in a private liberal arts university in Ecuador and the results showed that increased empathic concern and altruism were significant outcomes of this intervention, although qualitative analysis suggested a greater impact on civic attitudes and skills (Ramia, 2008). After this research, this university adopted a service-learning model in 2011 as part of its General Education Program. Consequently, this study emerged from a need to understand how Ecuadorian students attending a private university develop civic attitudes and skills when taking a service-learning course. Building on Ramia's (2008) research, this study aimed to test whether civic attitudes in students change after taking a mandatory service-learning course offered by a private liberal arts university in Ecuador, a first step in filling the gap in the literature about effectiveness of service-learning approaches in Latin American higher education. The relationship between service-learning and civic attitudes has not been studied in Latin American higher education institutions and it is relevant to understand if there is a connection between developing civic attitudes and students involvement in service-learning programs.

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

(1) To what extent do students gain in civic attitudes and skills as a result of participation in the mandatory service-learning course?

(2) How do students perceive their service-learning experience and any effects of the course on their attitudes and skills?

5. Methods

A mixed-methods convergent parallel design that separately collects quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano, 2011) was used to answer the research questions by integrating both types of data in the final interpretation. This type of design was used because one type of data alone could not capture the details of the problem studied. The design's purpose is to employ complementary quantitative and qualitative data to gain a more complete picture of students' experiences and transformations during their service-learning course. Quantitative data gathered was used primarily to address the first research question regarding the effect of the course in students' civic attitudes and skills. For this purpose a before (pretest) and after (posttest) measure was used in order to track individual gains in each aspect. Qualitative data also provided additional information about this effect as seen by the students. The qualitative element provided increased validity and context to the use of the instrument and, more importantly, complemented the information gathered to explore the impact of the intervention and the service-learning experience as perceived by students to address the second research question.

6. Participants

The population studied included all of the students enrolled in the service-learning course at the liberal arts university in the summer session of 2014, excluding students taking the online course. The total number of students registered during that period was 222. All students present during the first day of class of each of the nine sections of the course were asked to participate in the study and complete the CASQ. Students who decided to complete the questionnaire, 216 of the 222 possible participants, a 97% initial response rate, became the sampling frame for qualitative interviews. The posttest was completed by 188 participants, reducing the sample size to 85% of the population.

The average age of the participants was 21, with a minimum and maximum age of 18 years and 33 years old, respectively, and a mean age of 20.6 (SD=1.851). In terms of gender, 57.2% of respondents identified as female (N=123) and 42.8% identified as male (N=92). Students represented all fields of study and most levels of study offered at this liberal arts university since this course is a requirement for all students as part of the General Education Program.

In order to select the students to be interviewed, overall scores on the pretest of the CASQ were computed, and participants were divided into five equal strata that ranged from lowest to highest overall scores on the CASQ. A male and female student were then selected from each strata using a random number generator. Given the small number of students selected for interviews, this approach was used to make the qualitative data obtained from the interviews more likely to be representative of the larger sample in terms of gender and civic attitudes. If a student declined to participate in the interview, the next randomly selected student of the designated gender in the strata was asked to participate. An additional student participated in the interview because she confirmed wanting to participate long after the original request had been made, and the next randomly selected student had already been interviewed. In all, five males and six females were interviewed (45% male and 55% female, similar to gender breakdown in the larger sample of 43% and 57%, respectively). Three students were 19 years old, two students were 20, three students were 21, and three students were 22. The students came from various fields of study, including: business administration, physics, international relations, environmental sciences, psychology, industrial engineering, biotechnical engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, contemporary arts, and nutrition. In many ways, therefore, the interviewee sample reflected the larger student population.

7. Measures

7.1. Quantitative

The CASQ was developed by Moely et al. (2002) at Tulane University. This questionnaire was based on service-learning outcome measures (Astin & Sax, 1998, Eyler et al. 1997, Markus, Howard & King, 1993). Moely et al. (2002) administered the CASQ with six subscales: Civic action, interpersonal and problem solving skills, political awareness, leadership skills, social justice attitudes, and diversity attitudes to college students along with additional measures of social desirability, the modern racism scale, value of college, and mastery orientation to test for internal consistency and reliability. While the instrument was found to have relatively high validity and reliability with a college sample in the United States, the authors recommended further research including interviews to further confirm validity of the scales (Moely et al., 2002). While the original study by Moely et al. (2002) was conducted with largely White samples, Anglin et al. (2012) and Duplantis (2013) found the CASQ to be appropriate for use among ethnic minority middle school, high school, and college students living in the United States. It is important to mention that reliability and validity evidence has been presented for the CASQ in English (Moely et al., 2002) but not in Spanish.

The instrument used in this study was a translated version of the CASQ done by two researchers who are bilingual (English-Spanish) and Ecuadorian. The Spanish version of the CASQ was administered as a pre and posttest. The CASQ is made up of 44 Likert scale questions (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) in the six subscales already mentioned. The internal consistency of the pretest data was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of 0.891, which showed a strong internal consistency with this sample.

7.2. Qualitative.

The qualitative data was collected through a structured interview. The interview was used to confirm if the use of the instrument, developed within a different national and cultural context, was translated accurately to this culture and to explore the impact of the intervention and the service experience as perceived by students (second research question). The following questions were used in the interview:

1. What past volunteer experiences have you had?
2. What do you think about the social problems in Ecuador?
3. What is your role in relation to the social problems in Ecuador? What do you think will be your role as a citizen when you graduate?
4. What has your experience been like so far in the organization you have been working with?
5. What concrete experiences have you had during the PASEC (service-learning) course that has influenced your perspective on the social reality of Ecuador?

6. Have you undergone a process of change in your ideas or plans during this time? If so, what has that process been like?

7. What is your opinion of the (name of liberal arts university)'s decision to include service-learning as a graduation requirement?

8. What recommendations do you have for the PASEC course in the future?

8. Procedures

8.1. Intervention

The hybrid service-learning course used as an intervention in this study was offered during the summer of 2014 with nine sections taught by six faculty members. All of the students from this institution are required to take the service-learning class as part of the General Education program. The only prerequisite for taking the course is for students to have completed their first year of studies. The main focus of the summer course was social problems in Ecuador touching on a different topic approximately every week (poverty, strengths perspective, health, education, vulnerable populations, human rights, gender and discrimination). Students met once a week in a face to face session during eight weeks and also used a learning management system. All the course activities asked for students to relate their service experience with the weekly topic and readings. Both written and oral reflections were encouraged in the classroom and in online activities through discussions, journal writing, article critiques and a final portfolio. The portfolio included a series of reflection activities where students proposed an action plan to continue their involvement within their communities.

Students did their 80 service hours in different community agencies with which the university has an agreement. Some of these organizations have had this agreement with the university for more than ten years and others are new to this partnership. Students were free to choose which agency they worked in within a list of approximately 40 institutions that serve infants, school-aged children, adolescents and adults in urban and rural communities in Ecuador. Students decide in conjunction with the organization's administrator what specific tasks of direct service they would perform. A written agreement is signed by the student and the organization that states the specific activities students will be doing. After the completion of the service hours, both the student and the organization representative assess each other's performance.

Professors followed a master syllabus with the same objectives and major assignments, but each introduced their own variations in readings and class activities. Faculty were not all formally trained in service-learning but they all had at least three years of experience teaching this course. The students that participated in this study came from the nine different service-

learning sections offered during the summer of 2014 and their syllabi and activities follow the same learning outcomes.

8.2. Data Collection

Data was collected, as mentioned previously, during the summer session of 2014. Data included demographic data, CASQ scores, and qualitative data obtained from the interviews. Demographic data collected were students' age, gender, service-learning professor, field of study, and student identification numbers. Student identification numbers were necessary to match pre and post CASQ responses to test for change in attitudes and skills.

Individual responses to each of the 44 items on the CASQ were recorded for the pretest. Nine items were phrased negatively in the CASQ, meaning that unlike most of the questions where 5 would signify the greatest level of civic skills or engagement, on these questions 5 be the lowest level of civic skills or engagement, so these items were reverse-scored before data analysis. Overall scores on the CASQ for each student were then calculated. In addition to the CASQ questionnaires administered to all participants, 11 students were randomly selected for in-depth interviews using stratified sampling to ensure that a range of scores on the CASQ and genders were represented in the interviews. Students were randomly selected from strata of scores on the CASQ in order to increase trustworthiness of the results by ensuring that respondents represented a wide range of initial civic attitudes.

During the last week of the course, students were asked to complete the CASQ for a second time, and responses were recorded again on the 44 items of the CASQ as a posttest. The same procedure was used for the negatively phrased items and overall scores were calculated. Institutional IRB approval was obtained before the study began and a disclosure statement was included in every survey, which indicated that student participation was voluntary, that it would not affect their grade in the course, and that data shared from the study would not include their identifying information. Students were also told that they would be asked to complete the questionnaire a second time during the last week of classes, and that they may be selected for a voluntary interview. Students were given class time to complete the surveys at the beginning of class during the first and last classes of the eight-week course. There was no incentive to participate other than to assist in evaluating the program. Two of the researchers from this study teach service-learning courses at the institution where the study was conducted and that is how they got access to potential participants; however, the research assistant was in charge of administering the CASQ and students were informed that their participation was voluntary.

A research assistant from the U.S., who was not involved in teaching or grading the service-learning course, conducted the interviews and qualitative analysis. Using an outsider for the interviews was intended to increase the freedom respondents felt to express their true sentiments about their

experiences and the program as well as decrease potential bias in analysis. Interviews were arranged individually with each randomly selected student who agreed to participate during the fifth or sixth week of class. The interviews took place in available classrooms at the university, and generally lasted between 10 to 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, and student responses were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviewer used probing follow-up questions to encourage students to expand on short or unclear answers, though no follow-up questions differed greatly from the structured interview questions listed above. The interviewer, a native English speaker with a bachelor's degree in Spanish, translated individual responses into English for the purpose of inclusion in this article. The methodology of translation used was faithful translation, with the primary intention of translation being to conserve the speaker's meaning in Spanish as well as reflect his or her tone and level of formality. The underlying meaning and tone, rather than the literal words, were seen as the most important pieces of information to conserve in translation in order to shed light on interviewee's perspectives on service-learning. The responses were not back-translated, though using professional translators and back-translation would be a preferred model in the future.

8.3. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed by using a Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed-Rank test and a confirmatory Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance. A Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used to compare the medians of the pre and post measures of the average of each factor of the instrument related to the course as an intervention. The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed-Rank test was used with this data, which represents a one group pretest-posttest design without a normal distribution (Sheskin, 2003). The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance, like the Dependent Samples T-Test, is one of the best data analysis procedures to use in a design such as this one because participants act as their own controls (since there is no control group). This procedure has less error variance and greater power because the errors of individual differences are removed from the calculation (Smith, Gratz & Bousquet, 2008). Nonetheless, this statistical test assumes a normal distribution of data, which we do not have in this case because data came from a Likert-scale instrument.

8.4. Qualitative Data Analysis

The approach used to analyze qualitative data was an inductive thematic analysis, which was determined to fit best with the mixed methods approach of the study (Percy & Kostere, 2008). Data that related to the research questions were manually coded into concepts and sorted into emerging themes. All qualitative analysis was done with the data in Spanish, and later, individual quotes were translated to English to include in this article.

Representative quotes were chosen to illustrate the identified themes, as well as to supplement quantitative evidence for the impact of the service-learning course as seen from the participants' point of view.

9. Limitations

One important limitation of this study is that students were all placed in different organizations for their service hours, and the quality of their experiences in their placements likely affected the impact of the course on their civic attitudes and skills. Students also had previous service or volunteer experience and these experiences may have framed their expectations and their attitudes to this new service experience.

Because this study did not use a comparison or control group, there are possible threats to internal and external validity. Maturation, or the natural growth of students between the pre and post administrations of the CASQ, could have had an effect on the change in scores. However, the short time frame of eight weeks between the pretest and posttest should help mitigate maturation effects. At the same time, the short intervention may not have produced an important effect on the sample. It is difficult to account for other classes or activities that may have led to gains that affected posttest scores.

The sample used in this study is not representative of the Ecuadorian college population since a private university context was utilized and public institutions were not considered. The results of this study are only generalizable to similar populations. Additionally, the summer course lasts eight weeks, and qualitative interviews were conducted during the fifth and sixth weeks, which gave participants a short window of time to undergo transformation of their civic attitudes.

10. Results and Discussion

Results on the pre and post administrations of the CASQ are presented to address the first research question, which seeks to assess the amount of change in students civic attitudes and skills after taking the service-learning course. Following this quantitative analysis are the qualitative results of the in-depth interviews. To address the second research question, the qualitative analysis aims to understand students' perceptions of their growth (or lack thereof) in civic attitudes and skills in response to the course. Results are organized by research question.

10.1. Student Gains in Civic Attitudes and Skills

The Wilcoxon signed ranks test indicated that Factor 2: Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills, and Factor 3: Political Awareness showed significant gains between the pre and post measure. The rest of the factors yielded no significant changes between pre and post measures. Factor 2

yielded a $Z=-5.055$, $p=.000$ and Factor 3 yielded a $Z=-5.264$, $p=.000$ (see Table 1).

A repeated measures ANOVA test was also conducted which confirmed a significant gain in Factor 2 ($F=25.73$, $p=.000$) and Factor 3 ($F=34.30$, $p=.000$). The gains on these two areas are further discussed with the qualitative results.

10.2. Students' Perceptions of Service-Learning Experience

From the qualitative analysis, several themes emerged relating to how students viewed their service-learning experience and the extent to which the service-learning course affected students' civic attitudes and skills. Results are organized by emerging theme. Overall findings are some evidence for improvement in Factor 3 (Political Awareness) and significant evidence for improvement in Factor 2 (Interpersonal Skills and Problem-Solving) that corroborate quantitative findings on the CASQ. Evidence for improvement in all other factors were also found to some extent, suggesting students may have made more gains in civic attitudes and skills even if improvement on the CASQ was not found to be statistically significant. Students identified what was helpful and what would be helpful in creating an effective service-learning experience, which can inform subsequent iterations of the service-learning course at this university to improve gains in civic attitudes and skills.

Theme 1. Positive relationships with staff and clients increase motivation and empathy. Most interviewees identified their personal interactions with the client population and/or organizational staff as being pivotal in having an impactful experience in their organization. One type of interaction that students most often identified as improving the impact of their experience was feeling appreciated by the clients or the staff. One student emphasizes the appreciation she felt in her organization and its impact on her motivation and feelings of effectiveness: "I became super attached to the kids, and that motivates you to want to help them and teach them because they're really affectionate kids. As soon as they see you they come hug you, and it's really sweet, and that motivates people. And the teachers also see that you're not just going for your class [requirement], but that you're motivated and you ask what else you can help with. It's also nice when the teachers are fond of you."

A second impactful type of interaction that students identified was learning about the social realities facing clients through their stories or lived experiences. A student illustrates a moment in which she realized a way that her reality was from that of her colleagues and the children she worked with, recalling, "When we went to the movie theater, many of the little ones had never been before, and that moved me a lot. What's more, a teacher, the cook, who is 20 and a mother of two, in her whole life she'd never been to the movies and that moved my heart a bit." A third student relates his experience observing social issues while building relationships: "I've really liked [my

internship] a lot because I interact a lot with the patients, like after an operation I go and visit them and talk with them. Because sometimes they have a different reality. Like they're sitting in a hospital bed, and a bunch of nurses come and check things or give them catheters [...] [and I'm] conversing with them, asking how they feel, and for me to see these marked things in society – poverty – and be able to intervene really fulfills me, it's a nice experience for me.

As can be seen in the selected examples above in both of these types of interactions – feeling appreciated or gaining insight into others' lives and struggles – building relationships to have these sorts of interactions was associated with feelings of efficacy and motivation in the internship. These interactions also relate with the CASQ Factor 2, Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills, defined as a self-evaluation of own ability to “listen, work cooperatively, communicate, make friends, take the role of the other, think logically and analytically, and solve problems,” and thereby support overall gains in the CASQ found for this factor (Moely et al., 2002, p. 18). Furthermore, interviewees often related these personal interactions and attachments to an increase in empathy not only toward the individuals, but also toward more generalized marginalized populations. One student explained: My changes have been more emotional because I became really attached to the children, so now I'm moved more when I see low-income people. I've also realized that I see myself as more committed now. This has transformed into a responsibility for me, so that even when I'm done with the PASEC course, I want to keep helping them.

Another student illustrates, “After seeing so many people go through that difficult situation, it changed my way of thinking. More than anything, it's putting myself in others' shoes.” Developing empathy for groups outside of the individual's culture reflects an improvement in CASQ Factor 6, Diversity Attitudes, defined as “attitudes toward diversity and their interest in relating to culturally different people” (Moely et al., 2002, p.18). Furthermore, such experiences of revising a paradigm following a significant experience constitute transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997).

Just as positive interactions seemed to strengthen the impact of the internship, the opposite also appeared to be true, in that negative and unsupportive interactions led to feelings of uselessness and lack of commitment. A student explains, “I'm more like a dead thing [at my internship] and I just follow orders and do what they tell me to do, so it's not like I help the kids much. I try to teach them to talk but if they don't want to talk and start crying, [...] I think they get upset since they don't know how to express themselves and they get stressed and cry. And then the teachers stand there giving you a bad look [...]. So I think that really I'm not doing anything.” This student was not interested in working with toddlers and felt unsupported and unappreciated by the agency staff, leading her to feel even

more unenthusiastic and ineffective in her placement, focused on herself and not others.

Theme 2. Despite current lack of civic engagement, students hope to make a positive impact in the future, particularly after taking the course. When asked what their role was in addressing social problems in Ecuador, seven of the eleven interviewees said that they either did not have a role or that they were doing very little, especially outside of their internships. A few examples include: “I sincerely haven’t done anything about it [...] I don’t have a very involved role in solving these problems;” “I don’t think I’ve had a very active role;” “I think for the moment I’m not doing anything. I’m in the nothing category;” “Right now I don’t have a particular role.”

However, many students expressed feeling an obligation to be civically engaged, especially in the future, even if they were not engaged at the moment. They often tied this obligation to learning about social realities, and to their identity as part of the community. For example, a student stated, “I think everyone has a role and that obviously I’m Ecuadorian so I’m part of this and I have a role and I should do something about it. [...] It’s something in my upbringing since childhood, my parents always tried in small ways to make things better [...]” A second student said: “I really like participating, in an active way. I like to dive in and see how programs work and look for deeper goals [...] Like any citizen, you can’t reject society but instead through society, you have to participate so that things improve.”

In terms of future roles in civic engagement, most students found a way to connect their field of study to the social problems they were learning about, including an architecture student who wants to design sustainable low cost housing, a bioengineering student who wants to find treatments and preventions for diseases that affect people in poverty, and a nutrition student who wants to focus her work with low-income families. Three other students hoped to either start or evaluate social programs in the future as well, all of whom were either directly motivated to do so by the course, or encouraged in existing plans, as the following student explains: “I think more than a change [in plans], [the course] has been like a push toward the idea I’ve had for years about starting an organization, like it made me want to do it more.” The architecture student spoke about how he would incorporate social justice in his career, saying, “When I graduate, I’ve always thought about serving the community because it’s worth nothing to be the best architect if it doesn’t serve others.” This quote demonstrates that the student is attaching meaning to serving the community in the future. These students’ plans to engage and lead in the future connect with the CASQ Factor 1, Civic Action, defined as having a goal to become involved with community service or action in the future, and Factor 4, Leadership Skills, defined as self-evaluation of ability to lead effectively (Moely et al., 2002).

Theme 3. The academic component, while not as impactful as the internship, helps to develop critical thinking skills, frameworks for

understanding social issues empathetically, and reflection on experiences. Students identified several aspects of the classroom component that they found helpful. Students appreciated exploring different social topics each week, investigating causes of social issues, evaluating different sides of an argument, and reading the news regularly for class. These last two items are illustrated in the following quote: [The professors] make you find an article that relates to the topic you're working on that week. [...] In Ecuador you find articles in favor of the government, or against the government [...]. Here they teach you to see the two perspectives, and how you're embedded or involved [in the issue]. You can see which of the two is right, or if they both give you a half-truth, so you become more informed.

This student spoke about how she plans to continue reading the news regularly to stay informed following the course, relating to the CASQ Factor 3, Political Awareness, defined as a self-evaluation of awareness of current events and political issues, locally and nationally (Moely et al., 2002). This supports the quantitative gains students made on this factor between pretest and posttest. However, about half of the students felt they had already been exposed to information on social and political issues through other courses or reading the news, so they may have not gained significantly in this area directly through the class. Several mentioned learning more from direct exposure in their internships, which may help to explain the gains in Factor 3 on the CASQ for students who felt familiar with the information already: Up to this point, not much [has impacted me from the class] because what we've seen in the class are things I already knew. The class itself hasn't influenced me. What did influence me is even though I'd already worked with children with limited resources and been close to parents [...] each family always has a different story and that teaches you more, no? So the class has been the experience in the organization.

New frameworks for understanding etiology of social issues that were introduced in the class were also found to be valuable. One student summarizes, "Ultimately what impacted me the most [in the class] was the mentality that we Ecuadorians now have toward [...] poverty. We don't think that people are poor because they want to be anymore, but rather because they can't escape it." Another student described how her view of youth in poverty changed after applying this framework: It used to bother me a bunch when people would start to wash my car windows on the street. It's not that it doesn't bother me anymore but now I look at them and see that they're really young, they're kids, I don't know, 16 years old, and they devote themselves to that. And I start thinking, it must be that really they couldn't find anything else. What must their life be like, what was their childhood like?

Like the personal interactions and observations, the framing of poverty as a result of systems of oppression rather than shortcomings or failures of individuals led to an increase in empathy. Using a similar framework, other students also identified systemic issues as causing inequality, such as sexism,

poor quality of education, racism, divided social classes, deficient and discriminatory health services, and child labor.

As their CASQ scores would suggest, the interviewees in this study represented a wide range of civic attitudes, and many students did not adopt this type of systems of oppression framework. Using this framework corresponded with high scores on the CASQ for Factor 5, Social Justice Attitudes, defined as self-report of agreement with attitudes toward poverty and the solution of social problems (Moely et al., 2002). Several students spoke about how poverty and other social issues were perpetuated by negative attitudes (“I think that people unconsciously have in their minds that they can’t do things and they close themselves in a world of pessimism”) or by poor parenting skills (“it’s a lack in knowledge on the part of their parents where they don’t know their rights and also aren’t interested in bringing their children to the doctor a the normal times”), attitudes that correspond with lower scores on Factor 5. Some students held simultaneous views about the causes of inequality stemming from both systemic and individual problems. To assess how student perspectives change on these issues throughout the course, it would be helpful to do two interviews at different points in the term.

Out of all of the helpful aspects of the classroom component identified by students, the aspect that came up most was having space to process internship experiences and observations with fellow students. Such reflection is a central component of service-learning (Jacoby, 1996). As one student describes it, “Everyone, when they talk, they share their experiences. And many of them make us happy or leave us fearful because we didn’t know that was happening. Each experience is different and gives you something.” Another student described: Maybe the discussions we have in the class itself [were most impactful] because we’re 24 people in the class and our professor lets you discuss your experience, how it seems to you. It could be that there are a bunch of kids working with older adults or the work with adults or they work with children [...] so you can listen to what they have to say about how that population behaves in general and that part strikes me as really enriching.

A student whose professor did not seem to focus as much on this collective reflection and processing identified this component as something that was necessary but lacking: There should also be a space that people can discuss their experiences. Not only with something you do as an assignment but rather something that affected you a lot, someone stands up and says this happened with this person, I had this experience, because everyone can learn from each other. And that’s missing.

Therefore, this qualitative feedback supports the importance of incorporating significant opportunities for students to collectively reflect on their experiences to foster their transformational learning.

Theme 4. Service-learning should be a university requirement in order to foster student personal development and acknowledgment of privilege. All 11 students interviewed expressed support for the service-learning course

being a graduation requirement. The most salient reason given for requiring this course, mentioned by most of the students, was that the course and internship provide an important experience of leaving the privileged bubble of the university and learning about issues facing communities. This was seen as important to students because it provided them with ways to grow – either through gaining empathy, gaining skills for working with others, or developing plans for how to relate their future work to helping society.

The following student explains how leaving a space of privilege can affect development of empathy: I think that with this class, people become much more humble and understanding, more altruistic, like they open their heart to what's going on. Because there are many people who don't know, who aren't aware, who live in their world of having everything, sometimes lots of money, and they leave people in need off to the side. So having this class really opens the heart a lot. You say, 'dang, this is happening in my country. I live in my country with a lot of money, and there are people who really live on a dollar a day. Another student discusses developing skills: "You're taught how to interact with society or solve its problems and later you're going to be able to face those problems better. [...] I think all universities should do it [service-learning course]." A third student connected the experience to informing how to be helpful to society through future work: [The service-learning course] seems super fundamental to me because of the fact that being in an educational institution separates you from society a lot. So PASEC brings your feet back on the ground and pushes you to think about what you can with your degree for society. [...] it seems really basic to me that you need to have human contact and think about all the concepts you learn during your years in college and put them in practice.

Finally, a fourth student noted a way in which the privilege of students at the university could be leveraged through a service-learning program: [The service-learning requirement] seems like an excellent idea to me [...] and since it's a good quality school with a high academic level, I hope that all of us who will graduate will be excellent professionals with a good economic situation, so it's a good principle to get attached to volunteer work, and in the future to help in the organization you interned at or whichever one you want.

This student recognizes that the graduates of this university will be influential in the country, and therefore it is especially important that they learn and care about social issues.

Even the two students who initially expressed negative feelings about the required service-learning course supported the course being mandatory for students in general. One student had felt at first that this was another obligation she needed to fulfill and was only trying to get a good grade, and doubted lasting impact: "It's not like this work will continue your whole college career, but rather just in summer break and then it's over and you forget about it and continue your studies, as if nothing had happened." She ended up changing her mind over time about disapproving of the requirement

despite not having a very rewarding internship: Now it seems to me to be a super interesting and enriching experience more than anything, but before I didn't really agree with it. After going through the experience you start to understand some things – some reality that maybe you were blind to or that didn't interest you – so it seems to me now that [the required course] is a good thing.

A second student spoke about how difficult the mandatory aspect of the course was for her since a close family member was dying at the time, and she had to spend time with clients rather than her family. She said, “For me it's been super annoying doing all of these volunteer hours because in order to do good for someone, you have to first be well yourself. And in my case I wasn't.” Despite this experience, she still said that the service-learning requirement “seems good to me. Apart from my experience, for me it was terrible. But [...] to me it seems really important that a person leaves [the university] with at least a somewhat open mind in order to see that there are people in pretty underprivileged situations.

Finally, a few students identified a danger in privileged students working with marginalized groups, if the students have stereotypical ideas about the groups or a savior complex in their role. As one student explains: Sometimes this part of PASEC seems a little bad to me because you're conditioning the person to think they're poor, and that you're helping them, which I don't think is the idea of PASEC but rather that in addition to learning about what their life is like and how it's developing, you are learning from that person, not giving something to that person.

Therefore, a caveat to the required nature of the service-learning program would be that students would first need a strengths-based understanding of the communities and a theoretical understanding of the students' roles in order to not cause harm.

Theme 5. Students desire more flexibility and autonomy. A theme that emerged from the qualitative responses about recommendations to improve the service-learning course was to increase flexibility in several ways. Students wanted to be able to intern at organizations other than the ones approved by the university: “If you want to do a new agreement with another organization that you want, it takes to much time. They don't give you the chance to choose the one that you want. They make it a bit difficult.” A student mentioned wanted to do internships in other parts of the country: “It strikes me as super interesting to go to the rainforest [eastern Ecuador], go to other areas to help more [...] I think the class limits you a bit because you have to come once a week so you can't spend two weeks outside the city.” They also desired more flexibility in their projects: “I think that the projects that they make us do should be a bit more guided and not as strict. It seems that they're really strict.” These ideas resonated with findings of Moely & Ilustre (2011) that students will feel less negatively about a required service-learning course when they have a considerable amount of choice and agency

in how they can fulfill the requirement. Exploring ways to give students more options in future service-learning courses may improve the impact of the experience for the students at this Ecuadorian university as well by decreasing resentment about the required nature and supporting students' agency.

Quantitative findings suggest that students gained in civic attitudes and skills with the mandatory course specifically in Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills and Political Awareness areas. Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills are related to how students evaluated their ability to listen, work as a team, communicate, make friends, take the perspective of another, and solve problems (Simons, Blanc, Russell, Williams & Willis, 2009). Political Awareness is how students assessed their own awareness regarding local and national affairs and political events (Simons et al., 2009). These findings were confirmed with qualitative data gathered and complemented by a perceived gain by many interviewed students in all areas of civic attitudes and skills. Typically all service internships involve some level of interaction and cooperation with others, often times with people who may have had significantly different life experiences than the students. This interaction with people different from themselves provided students with the opportunity for growth in Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills as they navigated these new social situations along with a theoretical background in social issues from the course. Similarly, results also suggest that emphasis in following the news and class discussions about current national affairs were effective in informing students.

Given that students had statistically significant gains on the CASQ, which qualitative data support, there is initial support that the service-learning course does have a positive effect on student interpersonal and problem-solving skills as well as political awareness. The service-learning class could have a larger impact through increasing student autonomy and fostering more classroom discussion and critical reflection on student experiences.

Considering their privileged status, Ecuadorian students at a private university are more likely to enter positions of power upon graduation, as one student noted, as is the case for similar university students in Latin America. For this reason, private university students could benefit from receiving a strong foundation in their civic development, starting with developing their awareness of the reality of others in their country and being able to appreciate the perspective of someone different from them. The mandatory service-learning course, exposes these students to other realities as well as connects them to community organizations around them. Although, it is true that true service-learning is of mutual benefit to students and to the organizations and people they serve, the focus of this research was the impact on the students. In class and through the readings, students were exposed to and reflected upon ideas of social justice that include acknowledgement of privilege and equality of rights and opportunities. This focus is very relevant in this context

that is similar to other Latin American countries where there is a wide gap between the richest and poorest.

This study contributes to a better understanding of the use of service-learning models in higher education institutions in Latin America. The results support an effectiveness of the service-learning model as a mandatory course in a private university in Ecuador, and therefore may provide evidence to expand service-learning initiatives elsewhere in Ecuador and Latin America, including Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, where some service hours are already required. Students may develop interpersonal and problem solving skills as well as political awareness after taking a mandatory service-learning course, as well as become more empathic. If students are given at least some agency to choose their placement, it is likely that as with the sample of interviewees, students will be generally supportive of the required nature of a service-learning course, particularly upon completion. For these reasons, other institutions in Latin America could consider applying a mandatory service-learning requirement within their curriculum and expect some positive outcomes in students' attitudes and skills.

After conducting this study it is recommended to revise the translated version of the CASQ using the forward-backward methodology. Another future study would be to conduct a factor analysis of the CASQ within this particular population to develop a more culturally relevant instrument. Later, a replication of this study could be implemented to determine if the modified version of the instrument leads to different results and test for reliability. This study was implemented during a summer term; therefore, conducting a study with a semester-long course could be interesting to analyze since students have more time to reflect and perform their service. In addition to the mid-course interviews, pre interviews could be conducted to get a baseline on student attitudes and skills, and post interviews could also be done months after completing service hours in order to determine if impact remained. An additional topic for further study would be to assess the experience that the community service agency staff and clients have with the student interns. That is, is the transformational learning process beneficial for both students and organizations, or are there any drawbacks for the organizations' clients or staff in partnering with students?

11. Conclusion

Quantitative data from this study revealed a significant growth in two areas of the CASQ between pretest and posttest for students in the mandatory service-learning course at the liberal arts university: Factor 2, Interpersonal and Problem Solving Skills, and Factor 3, Political Awareness. These results suggest that students performing their service-learning hours, while reflecting with their peers in class discussions, developed their civic attitudes and skills through personal connections and the opportunities to solve problems.

Additionally, political awareness had a significant change from the pre to the post measurement, which indicates that students became more aware of how politics influence social reality in their country throughout the course. Qualitative data provided additional evidence to understand students' support of the mandatory nature of the course and the positive relationships they developed in their placements. Due to the lack of previous validation of the instrument for this population, there may have been more of a positive impact of the intervention even though quantitative results indicated a significant change in only two factors (although it is difficult to establish causation without a control group). To support this positive impact, qualitative data in this study confirmed that students went through a learning experience that changed their previous perspectives in different areas (transformational learning) while working with underprivileged groups and reflecting upon their previous paradigms and their privileged status (Mezirow, 1997). These results indicate that students went through an experiential learning process in which they reflected upon the connection between the service they were doing and the theory. Students suggest finding ways to increase flexibility in the service-learning course, as well as fostering more critical reflection in the classroom to further increase the transformational learning experience.

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