Impact of service-learning in the training of university students

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Abstract---Given the existence of inequality gaps in Latin America and a growing need of students in social issues, many institutions have seen as convenient the development of a pedagogical methodology based on service-learning as an effective alternative to these needs. This study aims to identify the impacts of service-learning programs on the training of university students. The methodology is composed of a bibliographic review of articles published on the impact of service-learning on university students. The research is specific and critical, the procedure followed was: select articles, identify relevance, synthesize information, group according to similarity and identify variables or factors associated with the study of the topic, thus selecting 30 articles related to the research objective, finally the information was organized in a matrix, then those with similar inquiries and conclusions were selected and grouped. The analysis allows us to conclude that service-learning produces positive and significant impacts at the academic and cognitive, civic, vocational and professional, ethical and moral, personal and social levels, generating professionals with comprehensive training with greater skills and abilities for better job performance.
Introduction

In different regions, the gap in social inequality between the most and least favored sectors has been accentuated, bringing with it significant consequences for access to individual and social well-being for a considerable proportion of the population, at the same time, the recognition and participation of people in the problems of society have been increasing, this scenario, of a social reality affected by the economic, political and cultural system, exemplified in the lack of equity and social justice, are reflected in the university environment, in situations of inequity and marginalization that deepens even more in Latin American societies (Bayón and Saraví; 2019).

Latin America presents a social context with high rates of inequality, segregation and social inequity that affects the educational dimension, not only at basic education levels, but mainly in higher education institutions, making evident the need to find alternatives for a reconfiguration of the role of the educational system (Ramírez, 2016). Higher education has undergone changes in the type of training it wants to provide to students, moving to a comprehensive and transversal training, mainly strengthening the social dimension of learning and seeking to promote civic development through connections between learning and community needs. (Tejada; 2013), within the pedagogical models that have penetrated the most in universities to achieve these new objectives is the Service-Learning (ApS) model, which allows the development of curricular contents together with the introduction of community services (Mella, Quiroga and Comesaña; 2021).

The service-learning methodology has been widely applied in different higher education institutions in Chile, reflecting positive effects on abilities, skills, leadership, adaptability, values, commitment, development of skills, etc. of the university students who participated in the development of these programs, therefore, it is currently considered an effective teaching methodology, even for students of the first university cycles (Godoy, Illesca, Seguel and Salas; 2019). In the same way, its successful application was observed in realities such as the Peruvian one, who, when carried out in third and fourth year high school students, it was found that it allows the development of citizen attitudes in students. (Marengo, 2016)

The identification and analysis of different educational practices developed outside the classroom and the evolution of pedagogical thinking to a holistic and inclusive perspective has evidently intensified the relationship between the community and the university (Mayor, López and Solis; 2019), which is why, based on the aforementioned, the objective of this scientific article of bibliographic review is to identify the impacts of service-learning programs or projects in the training of university students, in order to highlight the benefits and contributions offered by this methodology. pedagogy for professional, comprehensive and transversal training.

**Keywords**—pedagogical methodology, community service, social reality, professional training.
Service-Learning

Service-learning is defined by Furco and Norvell (2019), as activities specially designed to encourage and involve students in service experiences in order to improve learning; or as a teaching methodology that seeks the development of academic content while providing a service to the community that responds to a social need, it is a practical experience, of reflection and action, where students apply theoretical content, develop skills and solve problems real, fostering and promoting social awareness (Capella, Gil and Martí, 2014).

According to Rodríguez (2014), it is relevant to differentiate service-learning from volunteering experiences, the latter being experiences that do not seek the professional training of volunteers, do not follow a teaching-learning methodology, do not require supervision, standards or pre-activity planning. Likewise, Furco and Norvell (2019) highlight that service-learning programs provide a mutual benefit, both for the community and for the students, this being the characteristic that differentiates it from experiential activities.

Rubio (2009) classified the possible skills and learning that service-learning projects can generate in personal skills, which are oriented towards cognitive, affective, behavioral and relational skills, interpersonal skills related to social coexistence skills, skills for reflective, critical and creative thinking that favors the understanding of the challenges and problems of their social environment and their involvement, the skills for carrying out projects allow the acquisition of skills and tools to carry out ideas and projects that improve the reality found, the skills for citizenship and social transformation related to active participation in community activities, and finally, the vocational and professional skills that train the student for their future job performance and understanding of the work ethic.

The fundamental fields where the positive results of SL programs are observed are the following: academic and cognitive development, reflected in a greater development of conceptual knowledge and skills (Cazzell, Theriot, Bakley, & Sattler; 2014); civic development reflected in greater participation and concern for social problems (Hervás and Miñaca; 2015); vocational and professional development related to leadership skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, project design and management, etc. (Fernández, Arco, Hughes and Torres; 2014); ethical and moral development, personal development that encompasses the empowerment of students and their sense of value for the community (Chiva, Pallarés and Gil; 2016) and finally, social development expressed in the improvement of social skills, prosociability, their empathy, communication skills and the social projection of their career (Folgueiras, Luna and Puig; 2013).

University education

There is a constant claim by the students to implement tasks in which they can actively participate in a greater proportion, transferring their theoretical knowledge seen in the classroom to people outside their academic environment since it brings them closer to future contexts where they will practice professionally, this The unsatisfied need to carry out practical and not only
theoretical activities is one of the main motivations expressed by students to get involved in service-learning programs (Mayor; 2019).

The professional profile demanded by the current educational context not only requires people with competencies, skills and abilities based on theoretical content, but also with a high social, ethical and moral commitment, obtaining committed, responsible professionals with the willingness to positively transform their reality. In this sense, the university must prioritize the development and implementation of methodologies that better articulate the satisfaction of these needs (Ortega, Díaz, and Cámara; 2021).

The effectiveness of the design and implementation of the service-learning pedagogical method in the curriculum should be evaluated in the three dimensions of university learning, which are: cognitive and academic, focused on curricular work; ethical and social, which is developed through interaction with the community and its needs; finally the professional one since the students will know realities specific to their field of work (Mella, Quiroga and Comesaña; 2021).

Method

The present work constitutes a bibliographic review of articles published on the impact of service-learning in the training of university students in order to identify its advantages and recommend its use in teaching at the university level. According to Guirao (2015), the study is specific and critical, grouping the selected and essential information related to the purpose of the work. The procedure followed in the present investigation was: 1) Selection of articles, 2) Identification of relevant articles and according to the subject of study, 3) Synthesis of the information on the subject, 4) Grouping of articles with similar information and 5) Identification of the variables or factors associated with the study of the subject.

At the beginning, 50 articles were chosen through systematic exploration in databases such as Scopus, Scielo, Ebsco, among others. For the investigation of the published articles, the following keywords were used: learning-service (service-learning) and university education (university education), selecting 30 articles that meet the following selection criteria: they must be related to service-learning projects carried out by university students, no older than ten years and English and Spanish language, the 20 discarded articles were not related to the purpose of the study or did not comply with scientific rigor. The information was organized in a matrix, then those with similar inquiries and conclusions were selected and grouped for the development, discussion and final conclusions of the article.

Results and discussion

The service-learning programs applied at the university level have a positive impact on the civic attitudes and values of the students, since, through teamwork to solve a community problem, they develop their empathy and their capacity for reflection (Blanco and García; 2021), thus constituting a research and teaching
proposal, which unifies academic learning with community service in a compact and unified project, linked to real social problems, also facilitates the transfer of knowledge with social value and allows training based on experience (García and Gaitero; 2021) which will have repercussions on their work or professional performance (Paredes; 2019), and applied to the field of teacher training becomes an excellent tool to develop social and citizen skills (Gil, Moliner, Chiva and García; 2015).

When analyzing the impacts of service-learning from a human development competency approach, an expansion of the possibilities of achieving comprehensive professional training has been observed, originated by the transformative and holistic potential characteristic of these programs (Monge, Boni and Wilson; 2020); it is a training proposal with high potential in the university context, since there is quantifiable evidence of better academic performance, expressed in better grades in the subjects where this methodology can be implemented effectively (Cañadas and Santos; 2020). Likewise, it was found that it allows a greater connection between theoretical training with practice, as well as between academic learning and that from day-to-day experience; In this way, service-learning provides a more holistic and textualized perspective of education (Ayuste et al., 2016).

Likewise, its effectiveness can be verified in students of compulsory basic education, who, before the application of a program of activities based on service learning, developed improvements in their academic performance and in the quality and quantity of interactions within the classroom, both from the perspective of the teacher as well as that of the students, therefore; It is, without a doubt, a way to combat failure and early abandonment (Hervás et al., 2018). In the same way, in the case of basic primary education, it was found that the service-learning methodology opens new horizons for the design of innovative and socially useful practices. (Mayor and Rodriguez, 2016)

The professional identity of university students based on emotional commitment to the profession and to their society is favored by the service-learning pedagogical methodology, since students seek information and experiment, establishing relationships, making decisions, trying to solve problems and adopting certain values (Menéndez and Grigori; 2017); which contributes to comprehensive professional training based on social justice and the ability to commit to transforming situations of inequity, exclusion, segregation or invisibility faced by different sectors of the community (García, Carter, Santos and Martínez; 2020).

The social development of service-learning programs, which is born from the collaboration between the territory (community) and the university, generates students as agents of social change since it allows, progressively, reflection on the transformation of knowledge into based on experience, to transform their identity recognizing their otherness and becoming aware of themselves, which will allow them to become socially aware that will be reflected in active and committed participation to achieve shared goals with the territory (García and Lalueza; 2019); such is the case of the project “Memòria, recuperació d’artesania i sostenibilitat” developed in Barcelona, which allowed young people to connect
with the territory and its needs, fostering social awareness and acquiring new forms of expression based on cultural revitalization and socio-community intervention activities (Lopez; 2021).

Social responsibility is another aspect that is highly enriched when implementing the service-learning methodology, since it encourages the transfer of the theory learned in class to try to solve problems or social needs in real situations, which requires carrying out an analysis of those affected and their vulnerability so that the student, with their in-depth knowledge, can plan actions to solve the problem, increasing their social commitment and identifying themselves as an agent of change (Mayor and Guillén; 2021), in addition, the participants are more sensitive and have greater awareness of other realities (Martínez and Durántez; 2021).

In the field of civic development, the pedagogical potential of service-learning projects favors the strong and voluntary involvement of students, which allows the involvement of the student in the different dimensions of the school framework (Mayor and Rodríguez; 2017). It is evident that there is a youthful disposition in search of channeling their motivation to develop social cases, which has led to these proposals being successful and solidifying as an educational methodology with great potential at the university level (Sotelino, Mella and Rodríguez; 2019). There are even cases where the students went from an initial disinterest to a civic commitment and the desire to direct their professional future to the civil service (Zalduendo and Ozonas; 2019).

In university students in the educational field, the service-learning methodology improves academic performance significantly in civic-social skills, compared to those students who follow a traditional training, highlighting teamwork, intercultural competence, relationship with others and leadership (Mella, Quiroga and Comesaña; 2021). In this sense, Ortega, Díaz and Cámara (2021), point out that university students in the education career perceive that these programs improve their leadership and problem-solving skills, and are also interested in participating in future similar projects, likewise, they feel valued and respected by the members of the community benefited by the program, on the other hand, in addition to positive emotions, negative emotions have been observed, such as: fear of failure, lack of capacity, lack of management class and sadness due to unfair situations or non-ideal contexts observed in the community (Giles, Trigueros and Rivera; 2019).

In the case of physical education students, the use of this methodology has generated significant and positive impacts, mainly in the social, academic and personal aspects, providing students with added value by implementing it in pedagogy (Capella, Gil, Chiva and Salvador; 2021), also enjoys recognition as an essential disruptive methodology in initial training for providing contact with the reality of the classroom, fundamental for the development of skills in classroom management (Giles, García and Cervantes; 2021), likewise, the programs of ApS have a positive impact on the professional training of physical education students with intellectual disabilities, who show a good attitude and highly value the implementation of this type of program (Abellán and Hernández; 2021) and the participants of the community or institution acquire greater awareness towards
disability through education in values, and with special attention to the
development of empathy (Abellán, Segovia, Gutiérrez and García; 2021).

Maravé , Gil and Trilles (2019), mention that empathy is highly related to
interpersonal skills, has implications for the personal and professional
development of people and is a priority for all professionals, especially those in
the educational field or those who need to be caring for other people, thus
demonstrating that the incorporation of the service-learning methodology
influences personality traits by developing these socio-emotional skills and its
impact is regulated by the following sociodemographic factors: age, previous
participation in volunteering or associations, studies family, ideological
orientation and employment status.

In the same way, in university students of the business career, receiving classes
with methodologies based on service-learning, have developed their ethical
reflection competence, achieving proposals for business models and marketing
strategies that involve the communities close to them, their environment and
solve identified social problems (Monforte and Arredondo; 2021). In the case of
nursing students, they highly valued this methodology since it enables the
development and enhancement of skills through experiential experiences in other
social realities, they emphasize that collaborative work requires a high
commitment and motivation of the participants during the planning and
development of the activity, only in this way is the effectiveness and achievement
of curricular competencies guaranteed (Godoy, Illesca , Seguel, and Salas; 2019).

Regarding the implementation of programs based on the service-learning
methodology, a difference is noted in terms of the benefits that teachers perceive
according to their degree of experience, new teachers acquire knowledge to
improve their pedagogical performance and teachers with more experienced
benefit from participating in mentoring programs that in turn allows them to
develop research increasing their scientific production, both types of teachers
point out that among the most outstanding difficulties are the lack of constant
training, little involvement of the university and limited funding of the institutions
( Liesa , Latorre, Cored and Vázquez; 2020). These programs are highly valued by
the participants, as long as they are designed taking into account the theory,
reality and reflection of the same, in addition to having multidisciplinary advice
and support from the university, which in turn earns prestige and recognition
(Mayor, Lòpez and Solis; 2019).

Conclusions

The service-learning programs or projects used as a pedagogical methodology in
the training of professionals have positive impacts at the academic and cognitive,
civic, vocational and professional, ethical and moral, personal and social levels,
equipping both students and teachers of better skills and abilities for a better job
development thanks to a comprehensive and transversal training demanded by
today’s society.

However, the implementation of service-learning programs requires the
commitment of universities, external institutions, advisors and students, who
must have a high degree of motivation to achieve all the objectives set, likewise, the design of the program must be based on the reflection of the social problems identified in the territory or community, whose solution must be based on the theoretical knowledge developed in the classroom.

The integration of the service-learning methodology in the university context has been oriented mainly to education careers or those that involve attention to other people, observing great positive and significant impacts, which is why it is necessary to implement these programs in different careers to evaluate the impacts in said areas and obtain opportunities for improvement in the design and execution of the projects.

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