Proposal for a Paper Presentation

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Abstract:

1.   Introduction

How does the Service-Learning Teaching Assistant (SLTA) Program promote students' development? *Service-Learning Community Impact Model* has provided the framework on maximizing the impact of the community service via service-learning projects (Office of Service-Learning in Lingnan University, 2016). However, there is a lack of study investigating from the teaching assistants' perspective to see how they benefit when they facilitate in the service-learning course. The study found out that "Active Listening", "Anticipating and Solving Problems", and "Influencing Others" are the leadership qualities significantly developed in the SLTA Program. The SLTA Program is unique to its people-development-oriented, peers mentorship, and roles and responsibilities contributing to the success of the SLTA's personal development with service-learning.

2.   Theoretical framework/literature review

2.1 Service Leadership

There is no general agreement on the basic meaning of "leadership" (Grint, 2010). Its importance is recognised in society, especially in university education. The research focuses on the service leadership. It is about satisfying the needs by consistently providing the highest quality service, exercised through distributed authority, aimed at identifying and meeting the genuine needs of service recipients (Chung, 2012; 2015). Service leadership is identified as a highly effective practice for students to adopt in service-learning teams when it is collectively provided with initiative taking. In other words, the service leadership is the distributed practice of people-oriented leadership for service. (Snell, 2014)

2.2 Ten Service leadership qualities

Based on the graduate attributes of Lingnan University which its motto of "education for service", ten service leadership qualities are selected as the model for students' leadership development in service-learning. The service leadership qualities practised in Lingnan are designed as below.

Service Leadership Qualities Practising in Lingnan (Snell, 2015)
Active listening Anticipating and solving problems Caring disposition Showing originality in expressing opinions Contributing to cohesiveness and close relationships Committing to continuous improvement Undertaking delegated responsibilities Civic engagement Influencing others Project coordination skills

2.3 What is Service-Learning Teaching Assistant Program?

There is no definition of what is a service-learning teaching assistant. Separately, service-learning is "a form of experiential learning that combines academic coursework with voluntary service in the community" (Deeley, 2010) And the title "teaching assistant" is simply one of the terms to describe who work to support teaching and learning (DfES, 2000). By combining these two, Lingnan establishes a service-learning teaching assistant program aims to recruit and train students leaders by developing a one-to-one relationship with faculty members, university peers, community partners and coordinators. Throughout the journey, SLTAs grow in terms of service leadership qualities, as well as personal and professional development. Under the Program, SLTAs are required to support communications between stakeholders, address different targets' needs and foresee potential issues and facilitate reflection with the integration to academic knowledge. According to the service-learning pathway, students will be transformed to be service-learning students leaders in terms of the ten leadership qualities. (Chan, 2015)

3.   **Methods/analysis**

3.1 Methodology

Under the exploratory and open-ended position, qualitative methods is adopted in the study. It aims at answering the questions:

1) What are the leadership qualities significantly developed in SLTA?

2) What are the deciding factors resulting in the SLTAs' acquirement of service leadership

qualities?

3) What is the uniqueness of the SLTA Program?

These are the research questions mostly concerns the SLTA's internal learning and realization. Thus, qualitative method is most suitable approach to answering the questions.

Ten individual interviews were conducted with SLTAs. In order to balance the profile of the interviewees, five past SLTA and five current SLTA were selected through snowball sampling and the conneciton of Office of Service-Learning. One-to-one phone interviews are conducted. Each interview is conducted in about one hour and guided by a list of open-ended questions identifying with the research questions. Semi-structured interview, as a key methodology tool, interviewees are given rooms to freely talk about their own points of view without getting swayed away the research questions.

3.2 Data Collection

Ten interviews were conducted from February to May 2019 with students who have joined the Service-Learning Teaching Assistant Program from academic year 2013/14 to 2018/19. The following table shows the respondents' profiles:

Student	Faculty BSS: Bachelor of social science BBA: Bachelor of Business Administration BA: Bachelor of Arts	Graduation Year	Year started joining SLTA	Duration participated in SLTA Program	Title of SLTA
A	BBA	2019	2018/2019	1	Junior TA
B	BBA	2016	2013/2014	3	TA Leader
C	BAS	2019	2018/2019	1	Junior TA
D	BBA	2018	2015/2016	3	TA Leader
E	BSS	2019	2016/2017	3	TA Leader

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F	BSS	2018	2017/2018	1	Junior TA
G	BBA	2017	2015/2016	2	TA Leader
H	BBA	2018	2015/2016	3	TA Leader
I	BA	2019	2018/2019	1	Junior TA
J	BBA	2019	2018/2019	1	Junior TA

3.3 Data Analysis

Based on the ten interviews, a ranking on the degree of service leadership qualities is stated by students. This supplementary data below expressed which qualities are more likely to be experienced by SLTAs and supported the deciding factors on developing their qualities with examples given during the interviews. The following table shows the frequency of each qualities are selected in each ranking:

Service Leadership Qualities	Interviewees' rankig of the leadership qualities									
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Active listening	3	/	/	1	3	/	1	1	1	/
Anticipating and solving problems	/	6	/	/	1	3	/	/	/	/
Caring disposition	/	2	1	/	2	1	2	1	/	1
Showing originality in expressing opinions	1	/	/	/	/	/	/	2	1	5
Contributing to cohesiveness and close relationships	1	1	1	1	/	/	2	1	/	2
Committing to continuous improvement	2	1	2	2	/	1	1	/	1	/
Undertaking delegated responsibilities	1	/	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	/
Civic engagement	/	/	/	/	1	2	1	2	2	2
Influencing others	/	/	3	2	1	/	1	/	3	/
Project coordination skills	1	/	2	2	1	/	1	2	1	/

From the above table, it is shown that most of the qualities are equally selected from high to low ranking. Hence, the top three most significant service leadership qualities are highlighted regarding the mode in the first to the third rank. "Active Listening" was ranked at the most important qualities by 3 three times, "Anticipating and Solving problem" was ranked mostly at the second place by 6 times, and "Influencing others" was ranked mostly at the third place by 3 times.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the finding, all SLTAs have a personal development with a different degree. Surprisingly, not only can they develop the ten leadership qualities, but also other types of leadership qualities.

4.1 Leadership qualities significantly developed in leadership model

a) **Active Listening**
"It is the basic attribute should be included as SLTA. Without active listening, we cannot understand the different stakeholders' needs. Otherwise, we cannot match their expectations and deal with their concerns," H mentioned.

SLTAs see their role as a bridge to link up and ensure quality communication within all the stakeholders including professors, students, service targets, agency partners and coordinators. By handling multiple stakeholders, they used skills including active listening and questioning to figure out their hidden needs and desires during meetings. For instance, one of the service-learning courses required students to design a souvenir for the elderly. The SLTA guided them to communicate with the elderly together and hence students can finally design a souvenir matched with targets' needs. Surprising, it demonstrated that active listening not merely learnt from SLTA, but also can be inspired to the students and enable them to work smoothly in the service-learning project.

b) **Anticipating and Solving Problems**
SLTAs are needed to foresee what are the coming issues and be the facilitator to eliminate them. One of the interviewees mentioned a course on teaching moral values in kindergarten, the social workers are worried about students are not capable to teach moral values efficiently to kids. At the same time, the SLTA also concerned about the lack of teaching techniques and handling skills in the kindergarten class, which may worsen the quality of the service project. SLTA thus became the facilitator by inviting both students and social workers to have a meeting to discuss how to create a better teaching quality to kids.

Apart from the service-learning course execution, senior TA leaders also need to anticipate the issues faced by the junior TAs so that they provide with relevant training topics to deal with the foreseeable problem. These two examples showed

that no matter the position which are junior or senior TA, they are always highly performing their problem anticipating and solving skills especially dealing with different parties.

c) **Influencing Others**
"To make a difference to the community, we should be inspirational to influence others to start a from small actions by spreading our passion in service-learning," D said.

SLTAs see their role as youth empowerment by leading students to work together and influence them to become the service leaders in the service-learning course. Internally, TA leaders will be the mentor of the junior TAs by sharing their past working experience and leading a reflection session to encourage TAs to nurture together. In the reflection session, TAs would motivate each other when facing some frustrating situations. Externally, SLTA worked as a role model of students in a service-learning class, their passionate in service would encourage passive students by working with them together during the whole semester and hence motivate students to enjoy the service project.

4.1 Common factors facilitating the development of leadership qualities

Based on the experience mentioned by interviewees, follow-up questions are asked on the deciding factors which facilitate SLTAs to nurture those service leadership qualities. Three common factors among the interviewees are evaluated:

a) **Service-learning Prerequisite**
Being a SLTA, one of our selection criteria is the prerequisite on service-learning experience. It is the most important factor to ensure SLTAs have a basic understanding of service-learning. It is found that most of the interviewees mentioned that the prerequisite enlightened their passion in service-learning and hence they would strive for the best to make a difference. For instance, interviewees mentioned that "the previous experience would perform as a role model on how to be a good SLTA by giving precise supports to different stakeholders, and deliver the service project goals clearly". Since they have built understanding and passion in service-learning, SLTAs are more willing to reflect on their performance on how to be a good SLTA. Hence, the ten qualities are easily be used and applied during the process.

b) **Decision-making Authority**
SLTA Program provides diverse opportunities for students to "try and error" and always "hands-off" to students to make the decision on planning and executing. Apart from working under the service-learning courses, SLTAs are taking initiative to organize the new SLTAs recruitment and selection such as structuring the work timeline, inviting stakeholders to be the panels, designing interview

formats and contents. Plus, the monthly training in the SLTA Program is mostly designed by the senior TAs with TA leaders. Coordinators would mostly be the shadowers to support them and provide with opinions on how to modify better. Instead of using a top-down approach to directly provide answers to SLTAs, the bottom-up approach to grant decision-making power to them enable SLTAs to learn deeply. This student-oriented approach with high flexibility allows SLTAs to apply the service leadership qualities when deciding the best solutions. The opinions given from coordinators provide guidance on how to do better and directions on nurturing their personal development.

c) **Reflection**
Reflection is an important action to evaluate the learning outcomes from past experiences. From our interviewees, it is found individual and group reflections helped them to deepen their learning on the ten service leadership qualities. For individuals, some of them personally have a strong sense of self-reflection. They would create a self-reflection space to look back their effectiveness and impactful of their contributions and also compared with the previous service-learning courses experience to ensure delivering high quality of service-learning journey to students. For the group, comments from diverse stakeholders and the monthly training encourage SLTAs to reflect regularly. For instance, most of the interviewees mentioned the monthly training provided a space for peers to share their thought and feelings, and teach the ten service leadership qualities. During the sharing, peers would try to match with their experiences with the qualities they have gained to conceptualise their performance. Furthermore, three interviewees mentioned the feedback from professors and coordinators given professional comments on how to improve in the future, which could see their strengths and weaknesses based on the ten qualities.

4.2 Other three significant qualities developed

Apart from the ten service leadership qualities, there are some other qualities developed in the Program, here is the highlighted common qualities developed among interviewees:

a) **Self-Reflection**
"Reflections helps to recognize my personal strength, as well as appreciating peers and community strengths," F highlighted.

Self-reflection brings huge influence on personal development. It is found that reflection is built into SLTA's habitual thinking. Its influence can be divided into two phases. In the early phase of habit building, all the interviewees reported they have reflection space in the monthly training sessions. This reflection space facilitates them to reflect on personal development in accordance with the learning goals set. This practice enables SLTA to build a habit of reflection.

In the later phase of habit built, they are able to conduct reflection when they encounter a different situation. For instance, one of the interviewees said she learnt to appreciate her effort made along with the SLTA program experience. By comparing her service experience with the experience in SLTA, she could only recognise the worse things happened in the service process in the previous experience. While in the SLTA experience, she was able to recognised self-appreciation in her reflection regardless of the performance of the outcome. This shows that the reflection habit built to strengthen personal development. Also, they would cover the reflection topics in their casual conversation whenever they have individual gatherings. Therefore, self-reflection has a significant impact on SLTA's personal development.

b) Management Skills

"As a final year student, I always have packed schedule and also with the workload on being a SLTA. I tried to find a way to balance my work and delegate the responsibilities by prioritize my tasks and set a timeline to make it more self-sufficient," F shared.

Management skills including personal management, time management, and tasks management are developed in SLTA program. In terms of personal management, SLTA learnt to adjust expectation and assumption. For example, some interviewees expected they had a heavy role in the administration. Also, they had an assumption that they had to finish the tasks as the TA coordinator or the Professor assigned. While it turns out that they realised they are one of the important stakeholders influencing the Service-Learning experience. Sometimes they might assume the Professor to take an initiative role on communicating with the agency while the Professor had the same assumption towards the SLTA. Therefore, SLTA learnt to manage personal expectation and assumption through constant communication with different stakeholders.

In terms of time management, SLTA learnt to plan the time used on each task in an efficient and effective manner. As SLTA are full-time students, they learnt to balance the time spent on academic and work in SLTA. For instance, some interviewees indicate that it is useful to learn the Eisenhower Matrix Model which helps them to prioritise the tasks according to importance and urgency. The SLTA experience provides a practising ground for them to apply the model. In terms of tasks management, SLTA learnt to be flexible to manage different tasks. Firstly, they learnt to manage multiple communication at the same time. For example, when many inquiries from different students, they learnt to address their concern in a short period of time. Also, they help the swift communication flow among different parties. In addition, they might need to handle ad hoc tasks, especially for booth promotion events. Hence, Management skills are well developed in the SLTA program.

c) Facilitation skill

"I believe that facilitation is the important tool to guide students to right track and reflect their performance, as well as integrating the knowledge in the course with the service project," G said.

Facilitation skill is well developed in the SLTA program. SLTA are required to deliver first-class presentation and consultation session. In particular, SLTA facilitates students' reflection on different occasion ranging from formal consultation to casual conversations. It is important to apply active listening and questioning skills to facilitate students' reflection effectively. For instance, most of the SLTA said they feel challenging to be a facilitator alone, compared with group project, there is no one to rely on and they need best preparation to enrich their understanding to the service content, course content and different stakeholders' desires to perform well. In addition, some SLTA required to conduct immediate debriefing after the field work, the ad hoc tasks push SLTA to perform facilitation skill in short time. Therefore, facilitation skill is well developed through the various opportunities of the application in the Program.

4.3 Three unique factors of SLTA Program

a) People-development-oriented

People development oriented is unique to SLTA Program. For example, SLTA have monthly training of soft skills such as time management and communication skills. The topics of the training are designed and consent by them. This illustrates they learn the knowledge from the trainings. In addition to the training, there are different opportunities such as SLTA recruitment, social issue campaign, and the tour of service-learning to the visiting professors and students. These opportunities help SLTA to further develop themselves with practical experience. Moreover, a learning community is built among SLTA. With their mutual sharing on personal growth and good case practises, it creates a supportive network and it creates a mutual influence in the community. It positively motivates SLTA to develop a better leader.

b) Peers Mentorship

"Senior TAs support help me to develop problem-solving skills. In the past, when I faced difficulties, I would directly ask for solutions from senior TAs. They provide me comments and let me know I should build up the problem-solving skills before I asked for solutions directly. It is useful when I became a TA Leader for next academic year," E said.

Peers mentorship is special to the SLTA Program. Peer mentorship is the supporting network among the SLTA. There are two ways of the manifestation: flat structure and complex structure. In terms of the flat structure, SLTA builds friendship and support each other. In terms of the complex structure, there are

senior TA as a role model to lead the junior TA. These peer relationship enable junior TA and senior TA to be more easy to speak up their challenges faced and seek for help. Also, they can gain support from peer efficiently compared with TA coordinators.

c) Roles and Responsibilities
Roles and responsibilities is particular to the SLTA Program. SLTA is the representative in two senses. Firstly, they are the representative of other stakeholders including the TA coordinator, the professor, service agency, and students. They have the responsibility to speak for every stakeholder and give a comprehensive view of the projects. For example, one interviewee said she could represent different parties' voice under various occasions. Secondly, they are the representative of the Office of Service-Learning (OSL) and they aware of their personal branding related to the branding of OSL. For instance, some interviewees mentioned they learnt to behave in a reliable manner especially in the networking events. One said it is totally "different from the experience received as a committee in a student society". Therefore, they learnt to be more mature and to bear the roles and responsibility of the "SLTA".

4.4 Limitations

First, the duration of students worked as SLTA is not considered in the research. The duration may affect the degree of leadership qualities they developed and their opportunities gained in the SLTA Program. Second, the graduation year may affect their memory of the experience in the Program, so some of their reflection on the past experience may be forgotten. However, their reflection after years of the SLTA Program may be deepened since they will have a deeper thinking process regarding their performance during interviews. Lastly, as participatory research, researchers might not able to assess personal answers subjectively and biased might resulted. Nevertheless, researchers can cross-assess each others' work to eliminate the issue. In addition, participatory research can elicit poor views as they have experienced the same Program and similar experience.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

Throughout the study, the final result finds that the SLTAs have gained a significant development with the unique features of the Program. The study found out that "Active Listening", "Anticipating and Solving Problems", and "Influencing Others" are the leadership qualities significantly developed in the SLTA Program. In addition to the leadership qualities developed in the selected model, self-reflection, management skills, and facilitation skills are the important skills nurtured in the SLTA Program. Moreover, common factors facilitating the development of the leadership qualities are found including prerequisite experience of service-learning, decision-making authority and reflection. Lastly, it is crucial to recognise the uniqueness of the SLTA Program including people-development-oriented, peers mentorship, and

roles and responsibilities contributing to the success of the SLTA's personal development with service-learning.

Keywords: Service Leadership Qualities, teaching assistant, service-learning

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Biographical sketch of each presenter

Please send the biographical sketch of the presenters together with the proposal using the following format:

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