

Learning outcomes of International Service-Learning in the Japanese context

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Abstract:

1. Introduction

Service-Learning and Community Engagement (SL/CE) are becoming more popular in Japanese tertiary education. The higher education policy in Japan primarily aims to enhance local Japanese community to be revitalized in the depopulated areas and to be globalized to live together with foreign workers and residents to overcome the aging society in the country. Japanese colleges and universities are encouraged to incorporate experiential learning in and outside of Japan into the curriculum in undergraduate education. However, not many higher institutions can align SL/CE into university curriculum, and researchers and practitioners in this field have been struggling with how to justify the impact on student learning, community/global partnership, and institutional mission achieved by SL/CE practices.

International Christian University (ICU) has a long history of International Service-Learning in university instructional program. Their practicums started in the late 1990s, a time when service-learning were unknown in Japan. The development of the program and its institutionalization were promoted under the university's Division of International Studies under the title of "International Internship" (later renamed as "International Service-Learning.") Then, the university expanded it to service-learning programs under the college-wide program around 2000, which enabled all the undergrads to take courses and participate in the domestic and/or international service-learning programs. Later in 2003, ICU developed the Service-Learning Student Exchange Program among the institutions in Service-Learning Asia Network (SLAN), and the scheme resulted in the further program improvement at ICU. Also, the grant from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for 2005-2008 enhanced to develop International Service-Learning Model Programs in Asia and Africa.

This paper reports on how the program characteristics effect on student learning outcomes. I examine 60 student written papers who did "International Internship" and "International Service-Learning," in other words from 1996 to 2010, a time the programs have institutionalized in the undergrad education.

2. Theoretical framework/literature review

Student learning outcomes in SL/CE have been studied in the United States for more than three decades. In the late ninetieth, Astin (1998) proposed the I-E-O model through conducting the quantitative analysis and examined intercultural, personal and social development by being engaged in community services.

Eyler, Giles, and Braxton (1997) analyzed students' attitude toward the social issues and problems by pointing out the five specific learning outcomes related to social responsibility such as citizenship confidence scales, citizenship values & personal values, citizenship skills scales,

and perceptions of social justice. Another significant research publication done by Eyler & Giles (1999) revealed how specific program characteristics affect student learning outcomes, and proved the effectiveness of curricular service-learning pedagogy.

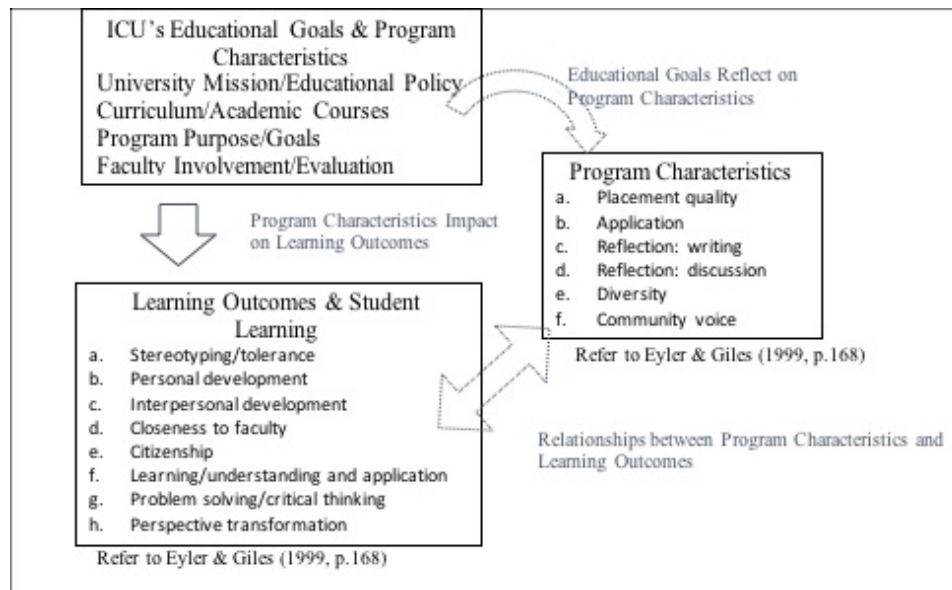
Recent studies on student learning achieved through International Service-Learning also have different implications. Parker & Dautoff (2007) pointed out the critical differences between service-learning and study abroad in four ways such as the scope of growth, long-term impacts, a focus of cultural learning, and teaching methods. Recent research presented the new benchmarks like “crossing boundary,” “perspective transformation,” or “defamiliarization” through serving in the global community (McCarthy et al., 2006). Various research outcomes to describe student learning outcomes through community and international service-learning contribute to justify the effectiveness of curricular service-learning.

3. Methods/analysis

My keen interest is how we can define the relationship between program characteristics and learning outcomes of service-learning in the Japanese context. Jacoby (1996) presented that “service-learning programs have different goals and different approaches” and “different types of institutions have distinctly different missions, traditions, and approaches regarding service and service-learning.” In examining this research, I would like to make a comparative study by employing the Eyler and Giles’s indicator model in 1999 and would provide some distinctive aspects to understand how similar and different service-learning practices and outcomes found at ICU.

Eyler & Giles (1999) provided some key characteristics and connected them to the significant outcomes by showing the relationships between the program characteristics and predictors of service-learning outcomes. Figure 1 shows the analytical framework of this study.

Figure 1 Analytical Framework



4. Results and Discussion

The result from qualitative text analysis of students' reports indicate that the relationship between program characteristics and outcomes is similar to the model in the US, but some critical differences are considered as unique indicators at ICU.

Unique outcomes at ICU are the impact on career choice and deep consideration of what "service" is. On the other hand, the "citizenship" outcome is less noticeable at ICU.

At the early stage of institutionalization on service-learning at ICU, students were encouraged to be committed to the non-profit agencies individually and are exposed to real Japanese business entities, which promoted student awareness toward the career choice. While after ICU started student exchange programs with Asian partners, elaborate preparatory courses encourage the students with an opportunity to think about what "service" is. ICU's foundation mission to "educate men and women to acquire wisdom necessary for the citizens of modern society serving God and humanity" may also influence on the unique outcome regarding the students' strong interest about what "service" is.

Regarding citizenship, it might be caused by the different cultural background in Japanese society where community ties are nurtured differently. It was the late 1990s when the Kobe earthquake occurred that Japanese people got to know the concept of volunteering, and the way of engagement to the community is also different from the US. Therefore, the service-learning in American democratic society might transform differently in Japanese culture in a sense and ICU's mission may encourage different approaches to the outcomes in citizenship.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

In this study, written papers who did "International Internship" and "International Service-Learning" at ICU during the past thirteen years from 1996 to 2010 are examined qualitatively.

This case study articulates how the educational goals, program characteristics are related to different indicators of learning outcomes in a Japanese university. The research outcome contributes to reinforcing a theory that each service-learning in different institution and region has its characteristics and approaches, and each aspect is rooted in its society and culture.

Keywords: International Service-Learning, program characteristics, learning outcomes, citizenship

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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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