Pre-service Teachers' Perception of Service-learning Instructional Strategy in Social Studies Curriculum in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria at centenary is riddled with poverty and high illiteracy rate, corruption and corresponding increase in unemployment, ineffective governance and apathy on the part of the citizens among others. As a result of these situations, there seems to be a paradigm shift to envisioning many new approaches to educational system to bridge the gap between the school and community for civic engagement. Some of such new approaches may be captured in service–learning instructional strategy (hands-on teaching and learning strategies that integrate meaningful service and classroom content). Indeed, Nigeria is yet to incorporate the service learning into the academic curriculum, despite its' effectiveness. This paper, therefore investigated pre-service teachers' perception of service learning in social studies curriculum. A descriptive quantitative survey method was adopted by using random sampling technique to select three public Universities in South-West, Nigeria. Three hundred (300) Social Studies education students were purposively selected, employing Service-Learning Perception Scale (SLPS). The scale was validated and its reliability coefficient was 0.75 using Cronbach Alpha. The data collected were analysed using percentage and t-test Analysis. The findings revealed that students showed greater willingness to enrol for a course in service-learning, if it would improve their career development, promote their personal and social development among others. Based on these findings, policy recommendations were made such as integration of service learning into university curriculum and clear standard guides that are back up by relevant laws should be put in place for proper implementation for civic engagement.

Keywords: Academic programme; attitudes, Service-Learning, Social studies, University education, pre-service teacher

Introduction

Nigeria at centenary is riddled with poverty and high illiteracy rate, corruption and corresponding increase in unemployment, religious intolerance, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, sexual immorality, gender discrimination, leadership problems, election violence, ethnicity, ineffective governance and apathy on the part of the citizens, among others. A critical analysis of these problems and issues that are imminent and recurring in Nigerian society, which to a large extent regulates her social climate, can largely be attributed to the type of attitude and disposition people have towards civic responsibilities. The situation is the same in Nigerian institutions of higher learning, whereby students' belief in their own capabilities to achieve a goal and feelings or mood towards civic responsibility is believed to be at the lowest ebb. This has directly or indirectly affected the nation's institutions of learning and society at large.   The knowledge and corresponding attitude of Nigerians towards societal issues at various levels had been found to be generally low and unfavourable (Ajitoni & Gbadamosi, 2012; Ogunyemi, 2011). There is the need, therefore, to change these positions for the better.

Education has been responsible for the building of the societal values. Alade (2004) observed that through education, people are enabled to develop their knowledge and skills, adopt new behaviour and be able to survive in the society. In the same vein, Oderinde (2005) opined that all over the world, education is the key to development which clearly demonstrated that education plays vital roles in the development of the individual, society and the nation as a whole. Little wonder, the revised National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), stated that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. This has made the subject of teacher's effectiveness a perennial one in educational discourse since the quality of education at any level is highly dependent on the quality and dedication of the teachers (Adu & Ojelabi, 2009; Obanya, 2009).   Hence, there is the need for effective teacher education by universities and colleges of education for development of knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers in training in various fields of studies such as Social studies, Economics, Geography, Physics, and Chemistry.

Consequently, there is a renew emphasis on development through education, which seems to be a paradigm shift to envisioning many new approaches to educational system to bridge the gap between the school and community for civic engagement. Some of such new approaches may be captured in service–learning instructional strategy. Service learning is an instructional strategy through which students apply their academic skills and knowledge to address real-life needs of their own communities. It provides compelling reasons to learn; teaches the skills of civic participation and develops an ethic of service and civic responsibility. It also, promotes motivation and retention of academic skills, as specific learning goals are tied to community needs (Gbadamosi, 2012; Franco, 2000).

The concept of service learning is based primarily on the views of John Dewey, a philosopher and educator, who advanced the concept that, active student involvement in learning is an essential element in effective education. He viewed the community as an integral component of educational experiences for enhancing a student's education and for developing future societies (Waterman, 1997). Service learning evolved as a vehicle to strengthen student's learning, to reconnect them with their communities, to

counter the imbalance between learning and living, and to repair the broken connection between learning and community. Dewey views experience as what occurs when a transaction is carried out within the environment. Dewey proposes two principles to ensure that an experience becomes educative: the principle of continuity and the principle of interaction. An experience would therefore become educational when the interaction becomes a continuous experience exemplifying growth and learning, keeping in mind that the aim of education is growth (Holloram, 1967). Reflection on an experience is also noted as important by Dewey (cited in Holloram, 1967) and forms the basis of experiential education, implying that learning from experience in an appropriate way achieves far more than theoretical or technical knowledge.

Service-learning is receiving wide acceptance in higher education as an innovative educational practice that strengthens the acquisition of course concepts while also affecting students' attitudes regarding social problems, community issues and civic action (Franco, 2000). It was observed that if service learning is well incorporated and implemented in our educational institution it would to a greater extent develop positive civic attitudes among students.

Teacher Training, Social Studies Education, Service Learning and Civic Engagement

Conventional teacher training programmes place a strong emphasis on ensuring that student teachers develop techniques of classroom management and the ability to help students acquire the knowledge laid down in mandated curriculum documents. Though an experiential basis for this knowledge acquisition is customarily provided through experience in the professional field, such as the teaching practice or teaching internships, institutional constraints often restrict what student teachers learn from this experience about young peoples' lives, the communities in which they live and the nature of their lives outside the school. This problem is addressed by service-learning, which is receiving wide acceptance in higher education as an innovative educational practice that strengthens the acquisition of course concepts while also affecting students' attitudes regarding social problems, community issues and civic action (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

The development of civic attitudes occupies a special role in Social Studies teacher education, because the overall aim of teaching social studies is to prepare young learners to an ''active and informed citizens'' for effective participation in Society. Social Studies teaching has the capacity to make good citizens and patriots out of the Nigerian children and youths. It covers cognitive, psychomotor and affective development of learners. In cognitive terms, it presupposes the intellectual development of the learners in understanding their environment, with a view to finding solutions to various societal problems. Moreover, affective aspect of the curriculum is designed to assist the learners to acquire necessary values, attitudes, virtues and competences for meaningful living in the society. The selection of objectives, contents and procedures involved in social studies instruction, if carefully and appropriately directed, can prepare a student to participate effectively in the progress of his community. On the other hand, psychomotor aspect of social studies teaching has to do with acquiring skills to solve societal problems (Gbadamosi, 2013). It is perhaps on this that one of the objectives of social studies in Nigeria schools

hinges: 't*o develop a capacity to learn and acquired certain basic skills, including not only those of listening, speaking, but those skills of hands and head analysis and inferences which are essential pre-requisite for personnel development as well as contribution to the betterment of mankind' (FGN, 2004, pg. 9).*

An active and informed citizen does not only possess the requisite knowledge and skills that would enable him/her live a meaningful life in the society, but should also imbibe those values and attitudes that are treasured by the society. It is when generations of learners continued to imbibe and nurture these values attitudes that the society is assure of survival. However, a number of studies revealed that service-learning can foster student teachers' engagement with the profession, enhance their self-esteem, their leadership mentoring ability, and increase their respect for and understanding of diverse communities (Honadle & Kennelly, 2011). It can also provide a compelling and broadening context for the transformation of teacher learning, leading to new understanding of ways of connecting with students at the margins of society (Shirley (2006); Lori & Cleary (2005).

Practices to increase engagement are multiple and varied, but service learning, is such promising practice, that links community service and academic study so that each strengthens and transforms the other (Honadle & Kennelly, 2011). It provides multiple opportunities to develop meaningful relationships and, in addition, enhances content - driven scholarship by focusing upon the application of knowledge to solve complex community problems. Students are able to integrate knowledge with experience and develop a better understanding of themselves, as well as an understanding of their role within the greater context of a democracy. Service-learning is recognized as one among many effective practices that stimulate greater levels of student involvement in "educationally purposeful activities," which, in turn, produce greater retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). In effect, service-learning creates and refines the social and learning connections thought to be important to institutional commitment and educational success.

As mentioned earlier, there are other studies conducted which have shown the benefits of students performing community service and service learning. One of the benefits of participating in community service is the development of a student's "self-concept" (Berger & Milem, 2002). In an earlier study Benger and Milem (2000), noted three dimensions of self-concept. These were academic ability, achievement orientation, and psycho-social wellness. A study by Rudy and Grail (2014) supports the importance of students developing their self-concept and he indicates that higher educational institutions have an important role in assisting the student with that development. Students learn about themselves through their interaction with others and the feedback they receive from that interaction. Community service provides the opportunity for students to learn about themselves through the interaction of people that they would not necessarily interact with in the classroom. He believes that students learn how to care for others and develop a commitment to the betterment of society through community service activities. Guarasci and Cornwell (1997) describe this as the "self-other" dichotomy. Students see how they are both different from and yet similar to others outside their immediate biographies; they begin to comprehend how self-respect and regard for others are intimately linked both in their development and in the needs of the communities in which they live (Gallini & Moely, 2003).

Thus, community service can have a transforming educational impact on undergraduate students.

However, there are four stages of service learning to ensure an ongoing academic connection while students develop in both cognitive and affective domains. These are:

Preparation includes all forms of research, social analysis, and planning. With guidance from their teacher, students identify a real community need. They use previous and newly acquired skills and knowledge from across the disciplines to understand the underlying problem and relate it to their studies. They often collaborate with community partners as they prepare to provide meaningful service. Students draw on the skills, talents, and interests of individuals while they shape the service to come.

Action is the direct result of preparation, enabling students to confidently carry out their plan and apply what they have learned to benefit the community. As students put their plan in motion, they come to realize how classroom lessons fit into their daily lives and shape the lives of others. Of course, learning continues as they meet new people and interact with their environment in meaningful ways. As they serve, students raise questions that lead to a deeper understanding of the societal context of their efforts.

Reflection is the vital and ongoing process that integrates learning and experience with personal growth and awareness. Students put cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of the experience into the larger context of the self, the community, and the world. They may compare initial assumptions with what they have come to learn through the authentic actions taken. They may consider what they would change or improve about a particular activity. Through varied modalities akin to using multiple intelligences, reflection proves truly essential.

Demonstration enables students to provide evidence of what they have gained and experienced through community involvement. They exhibit their expertise through public presentations—displays, performances, letters to the editor, class lessons for peers or parents—that draw upon the preparation, action, and reflection stages of their experience. Students take charge of their own learning as they synthesize and integrate the process through demonstration (Cathry, 2007).

It must be noted though that service learning has been shown to have benefits over conventional teacher training; service-learning also has its sceptics. It has been noted that there are those who believe that service-learning weakens the curriculum by spending valuable classroom time doing service projects in the community. Problems with service learning can also range from the demands of such a programme on faculty members to the quality of the learning activities assigned (Gender & Rene, 2007).

This concern has been echoed by others. Bender (2006) comments that applying educational principles in a practical setting is often less valued than theoretical in-class work. They note that service learning, with the integration of community service into an existing curriculum, is viewed with the suspicions that students are receiving academic credit for volunteer work and that academic standards are being

compromised. They however explained that the reason for this suspicion is the lack of faculty understanding or familiarity with service learning as an academically credible form of pedagogy.

To combat the concern that community service is not an academically valid form of pedagogy, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) developed the following critical elements of thoughtful community service to assist schools in developing a legitimate community service programme as follows

1. Community Voice – Colleges and universities should build bridges with the community. Their voice concerning the real needs of the community should be heard.

2. Orientation and Training – This is an important first step. Students should learn about the community in which they are serving, the organization in which they will be partnering with and the specific problem that will be addressed by their service.

3. Meaningful Action – This one could be the most crucial of the five elements. Meaningful action means that the service which is being provided is necessary and valued by the community. Students need to know that they are making a difference through serving and that their time was appreciated and useful to the betterment of society.

4. Reflection – Reflection is very important to the community service learning experience. Reflection should take place soon after the service is completed so that critical academic elements are added to the experience.

5. Evaluation – Evaluation can be used to provide meaningful feedback from the student and the service organization representative or immediate supervisor. Evaluation provides the opportunity for overall improvement in relation to the student and the agency.

Reiterating the significance of service learning, review of literature indicates that a number of world organizations and institutions have successfully implemented service learning programmes, have to a large extent becoming useful strategies in community engagement. This may result to meaningful economic, political, cultural and rural development all of which are needed for social change and sustainable development. The United State of American, United Kingdom, Japan, and so on to mention but a few, are actively in the forefront in service learning activities. At African level, the review also showed that a number of service learning institutions exist in South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal, Tanzania, where service learning and its components are fused into some programmes and courses with good results (Bender, 2006; Dugguh, 2013).

In Nigeria, research indicates that the traditional system of education is practiced particularly in universities which regard themselves as Ivory Towers - separated from the community in which they are located. Emphasis to a large extent is placed on Open, Distance and E-learning where community issues seem to have no place in the university curriculum. The universities may have not noticed that service learning activities are growing rapidly in other parts of the world. This might account for the world ranking of universities. This is because service learning has powerful impact on

young people, communities and their development. It is also a dynamic process through which students and social growth is tightly interwoven into their academic and cognitive development. However, some newly established universities like the Federal University, Kashere, Gombe State, ABTI University, Yola to mention a few, have service learning activities infused into the university curriculum (Dugguh, 2013; Gbadamosi, 2012)

Since this concept is emerging in some Nigerian universities and other institutions, it becomes imperative to investigate students' perception of service-learning before integrating this module into the teacher training curriculum. Uninformed students who participate in community service-learning programmes may develop negative attitudes and participate unwillingly. The voice of the student has been identified as an essential element of service-learning programmes (Rudy & Grail, 2014). Cathry (2014) added that people only learn what has meaning for them personally, and therefore they create their own learning through selective perception. Information about preconceived ideas gained by surveying the attitudes and perceptions students have, concerning service-learning and community service could provide information to lecturers about student teachers in teacher training programmes, so as to ensure successful integration of service-learning in teacher training programmes.

Furthermore, no study of this kind has as yet been done specifically for and among Nigerian higher education institutions and students, although, there are few studies on the topic of service- learning and its effect on learning outcomes for example, (Gbadamosi, 2012; Olabode, 2010). The Nigerian educational environment has not explored its possibilities and benefits in formal academic programmes and studies.

This study therefore, investigated the perception of pre-service teacher in adoption of service-learning instructional strategy to improve learning outcomes in Social studies. Furthermore, it sought to find out the factors that can motivate and deter pre-service teachers in adopting service-learning in Social Studies.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the conduct of this study:
1. Do pre-service teachers participate in community service activities?
2. What is the level of pre-service Social Studies teachers' perception of service learning instructional strategy?
3. Is there significance difference in pre-service Social Studies teachers' perception of service learning instructional strategy based on gender?
4. What are the perceived factors that can motivate pre-service teachers in adopting service-learning in Social Studies?
5. What are the perceived factors that can deter adoption of service-learning in Social Studies?

Methodology

This research adopted descriptive qualitative survey method. A sample of three hundred pre-service teachers who registered for Social studies methods was purposively selected from three federal universities. The 3 universities were randomly selected from the list of public universities that offered the course in south

western Nigeria. A total of 100 students (50 male and 50 female) were purposively selected from each university. The selection was done during Social Studies methods lecture periods and in the free time of students.

The researcher employed Service-Learning Perception Scale (SLPS) adapted from Bender and Jordan (2007) titled Service-Learning Attitude and Perception Scale (SLAPS). It contains both open-ended and closed ended questions. It was divided into three sections made up of a total of   items. Section A consists of the demographic information of respondents - gender, age, level and marital status. Section B covered items about experience and participation of respondents in community service to draw out their previous and current knowledge and participation in community service, and to also find out if they would wish to engage in such activities in future. The respondents were expected to express their views in the affirmative or negative by selecting Yes or No. Section C was a four-point likert scale designed to measure perception of the students on service learning. The responses varied from strongly agree- (5) to strongly disagree-(1). Respondents were required to choose the most appropriate answer and provide answers in writing where necessary. This part was hence made up of two open-ended questions.   The instrument was re-validated using experts' review and the internal consistency reliability measure was calculated using Cronbach alpha which yielded reliability value of 0.75. The researcher and two research assistants administered the questionnaires to the respondents and collected back on the spot after their completion by the students. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and t-test.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized by the five research questions and the questions from the student survey related to each research question.

Table 1.0: Percentage of Respondents on the basis of Gender

GENDER	FREQUENCY	%
Male	150	50.00
Female	150	50.00
Total	300	100.00

Table 1.0 shows the respondents distribution by gender. There are one hundred and fifty participants comprising (50%) male and (50%) female.

Research Question 1: Do pre-service teachers participate in community service activities?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Pre-service Teachers Participation in Community-Service Activities

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Have you heard of community service?	264	88.00	36	12.00
2.	Have you ever participated in any voluntary activity in your community?	76	25.76	219	74.24

3.	Have you participated in any voluntary activity in any other community?	42	14.00	258	86.00
4.	Do you participate in any public enlighten programme in your school?	61	20.89	231	79.11
5.	Do you currently belong to any voluntary association?	46	15.86	244	84.14
6.	Do you have any previous community service experience?	76	25.33	224	74.67

Source: Field work, 2014

According to table 2, 264 representing 88.0% of the respondents indicated that they have heard of community service. This is in consonance with, James, Stella and Paul (2010) in which 92.9% of the respondents indicating that they have heard of community service. Two hundred and nineteen representing 74.24% of the respondents indicated that they have not participated in voluntary activity. Also, 224 (74.67%) do not have any previous community service experience.

This shows that, majority of the respondents, have heard about community service but has not participated in community service and do not join voluntary association in the campus. This implies that pre-service teachers could not adequately utilize the knowledge acquired in school to meet societal needs while in school.

Research Question 2: What is the pre-service Social studies teachers' perception of service learning instructional strategy?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Pre-service Teachers Perception of Service Learning Instructional Strategy

S/N	STATEMENT	AGREED (%)	DISAGREED (%)
1.	Community service gives opportunity to bring my expert knowledge to bear on my community	256 (85.30)	44 (14.70)
2.	I feel a sense of duty to participate in voluntary community service	105(36.33)	184(63.67)
3.	Community service broadens one's knowledge of diversity, career choices and social awareness	251 (83.67)	43(16.33)
4.	Community service gives opportunity for students to solve real life problems	231 (79.11)	61 (20.89)
5.	If there is opportunity, I will enrol for a course/module with community service	234 (80.41)	57 (19.59)
6.	I would like to participate in any community service activity in the near future	205 (69.73)	89 (30.27)
7.	It is important to me, to have a sense of contribution and helpfulness through community service	169 (57.88)	123 (42.12)
8.	Combining community service with curriculum makes learning relevant to the needs of the society	226 (77.66)	65(22.34)

Source: Field work, 2014

It could be deduced from the data that, 231 representing 79.11% of the total respondents perceived that community service gives opportunity for students to solve

real life problems while 61 (20.89) disagreed. With responses to whether community service gives opportunity to bring my expert knowledge to bear on my community, 256 representing 85.30 % of the respondents agreed, 44 representing 14.70% disagreed. The respondents 205 (69.73%) did however indicate that they would participate in any community service activity in the near future and would like to enrol for a course/module which included community service 234 representing 80.41% while 57(19.59) disagreed. This findings support the report of Bender & Jordan (2007). The respondents felt that they would benefit from carrying out community service while in school in terms of career, personal and social development. This implies that pre-service teachers had positive perception of the use of service learning in the teaching of social studies and ready to adopt service learning as indicated in the response that ''if there is opportunity I will enrol for a course/module with community service''.

Research Question 3: is there significant difference in pre-service Social studies teachers' perception of service learning instructional strategy based on gender?

Table 4: T-test Analysis Comparison of Pre-service Teachers' Perception of Service Learning Instructional Strategy in Social Studies based on Gender

Pre-service Teachers' Perception	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab (0.005)	Sig.	Remark
Male	150	58.97	17.27	298	1.58	1.96	0.111	NS
Female	150	60.15	15.86					

*Sig at p > 0.005

Table 4 revealed that there was no significant difference in perception of male and female pre-service Social studies teachers on service learning instructional strategy. This is because; the t-cal (1.58) is less than t-tab value (1.96). Hence, it implies that there was no difference in the opinion of both sexes. Both male and female see the need to connect learning with real life problems.

Research Question 4: What are the perceived factors that can motivate pre-service teachers in adopting service-learning in Social Studies?

The respondents highlighted likely factors that would motivate pre-service teachers to enrol for a course/module which included community service. The majority indicated career/future plans and better performance in learning outcomes; personal development; understanding of social problems and appreciating students. These results highlighted the fact that students are career-oriented and would like to take part in activities that would benefit them personally, socially and also benefit their career development.

Research Question 5: What are the perceived factors that can deter adoption of service-learning in Social Studies?

Open-ended question on what might limit the likelihood that pre-service teachers will embrace service-learning was raised and respondents mirrored the perceived factors. Majority of respondents indicated that low knowledge as to how to use service-

learning would decrease their likelihood of doing so; many also suggested time constraint as a result of busy scheduled. Some also, mentioned lack of fund, choice of service to render, lack of reward on service rendered and insecurity in the nation. This latter finding is consistent with Patel (2005); Lori & Cleary, (2005) results that some factors can limit effectiveness of service-learning instructional strategy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the outcomes of this study it can be concluded that pre-service teachers had very low participation in community service activities and had positive perception of service-learning instructional strategy; this shows a great willingness to do community service related to their current teacher-training programme in Social studies. It also, implies that there is urgent need for the universities to incorporate and emphasise the importance of participating in community service into the curricular package.

Prior knowledge about community service-learning should be regarded as important when considering the integration of this component into a course/module, as it has an identifiable influence on students' perception of community service-learning and their willingness to do service-learning as part of their teacher training. The result also indicated that there are some factors that can limit effectiveness of service-learning.

It is therefore recommended that:
- Faculties of education in the nation's universities and colleges of education should accept the full responsibility of preparing teachers by providing them with pedagogical skills to meet up with societal expectations by integrating service learning into the curriculum of Social studies.
- Proper planning, funding of community service and clear standard guides should be put in place that is back up by relevant laws for proper implementation.
- Teacher educators and their institutions should not only include service learning in their curriculum but should also provide practical experiences for pre –service teachers to be well equipped on the use of service learning instructional strategy.
- Teachers should develop clear learning objectives that could address real community needs. This will bridge the gap between the school and community.
- Students' disposition to community service-learning should be regarded as important when considering the integration of this component into a course/module.
- Government should organize a form of re-training programme for teacher's educators in the effective use of service learning instructional strategy through organization of workshop, seminars and conferences. This would help them to effectively apply the strategy in teaching of Social Studies to bring about change in the universities and society at large for civic engagement.

This research should be replicated in all universities in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, so that a more generalization would be made. Further research could investigate on the effect of service learning instructional strategy on pre-service teachers' learning outcomes.

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