SERVICE LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR TRANSFORMATION AMONG STUDENTS: A THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

As an emerging teaching methodology in the Nigerian context, service learning has the potentials to add value not only to communities, but also to students who are the principal participants. That is the main problem of this paper. Therefore, the general objective of the paper is to make a theoretical exposition of how service learning influences the behavior of individuals involved in serving communities. To achieve this objective, relevant literature and theories on both service learning and behavior transformation including those of Prashaska & DeClemente (1984), Kolb (1984), Dewey (1938) and Skinner (1974) were reviewed. Literature findings indicate that if service learning is effectively implemented based on the behavior change models and processes, the behavior of students are expected to change from unhealthy behavior to healthy behavior. The solutions the paper proffers are that service learning should meet certain conditions in order to have a strong base for a successful process of behavior transformation and so on. The paper adds to knowledge in the sense that it supplements previous studies on service learning and behavior transformation.

Keywords: Service Learning, Behavior Transformation, Participants, Trans-Theoretical Model, Experiential Model, Reinforcement.

INTRODUCTION

Experts and organizations of learning are continually searching for new strategies that may impact positively on the lives of people (especially youths) and communities. There is no gain in saying that over the years the behavior (attitudes) of youths have deteriorated to such an extent that the social political culture and indeed the planet (environment) and well-being are affected negatively. In order to transform (change) behavior to achieve goals, experts have found solution to attitudes transformation through many approaches and techniques often through a process of trial and error. However, a key to attitudes transformation lies in trying new methods and finding ways to stay motivated so that such transformation may impact positively on the lives of others and the people around them.

Psychologists have developed a number of methods to effectively help people transform their attitudes or behavior. Many of these techniques have been used successfully by therapist, physicians and teachers. The paper focuses on the techniques teachers now apply to transform behavior. One of such techniques or methods use in transforming behavior is through service learning. Service learning is education in action and places a lot of premium of building communities through service. Under service learning programs, students or youths assumptions are challenged. They are also challenged to enlarge their view of the world and are united to engage their intelligence and imagination while learning from and partnering with the larger communities.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The basic objective of this paper therefore is to make a theoretical exposition of service learning and behavior transformation among participants especially students. Service learning is students and community centered. If it is effectively implemented through the process of behavior change, their unhealthy behavior may likely change to healthy and satisfactory ones.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

These clarifications cover service learning and behavior transformation. Service Learning is a teaching method that integrates service and academic learning to promote increased understanding of course content while helping the students develop knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to deal effectively with the complex social issues and problems. At the same time, it addresses unmet needs.
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It is an approach that emphasizes reflection and experimental, field-based learning as a way to engage the learner personally with the curriculum. Service learning is also a teaching methodology that enables students to apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to meaningful service to the community. Through structured critical reflection activities, students analyze their service experience as it reciprocally applies to their academic and career development. Service learning presents a unique and enriching learning and personal growth experience for students and university lecturers while strengthening communities by addressing unmet community needs and wants. (www.goloservicelearning.org/what_servicelearning).

As pedagogy, service learning emphasizes meaningful student-learning through applied active learning that draws on multiple knowledge sources (academic, student knowledge and experience and community knowledge) and provides students with ample opportunities for ethical and critical reflection and practice. By confronting issues and problems in complex natural contexts, students in service learning courses develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter, a practical knowledge of community decision making process, and strategies for transforming knowledge and problem solving skills to new situations. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/servicelearning).

GOALS OF SERVICE LEARNING
For this paper, the following objectives of service learning are highlighted:

a. To challenge the student assumption, enlarge their view of the world and invite them to further engage their intelligence and imagination while learning from and in partnership with the larger community.

b. To provide support for faculty interested in integrating service learning into teaching, research, service and extension.

c. To develop student leaders within the field of service-learning.

d. To meet community identified needs and activate community partnerships.

e. To disseminate models of service-learning excellence to stakeholders within and beyond the University community.

The value of service learning
Service learning, if properly implemented, has the following value (benefits) to the students, the department (faculty), the university and the community. These benefits are:

For the Student

a. Enhance the understanding of the academic curriculum
b. Provide opportunities that accommodate different learning styles
c. Provide diverse and practical ‘real-world’ experiences
d. Enhance analytical skills and social development
e. Encourage community involvement
f. Foster civic responsibility
g. Interact with people of diverse cultures and lifestyles
h. Raise awareness of social justice issues
i. Increase sense of self-efficacy
j. Provide valuable and competitive career exploration opportunities.

For the Department or Faculty

a. Inspiration and invigoration of teaching methods
b. Increased student contact through greater emphasis on student-centered teaching
c. A new perspective in learning and an increased understanding of how learning occurs
d. Connecting the community with curriculum and becoming more aware of current societal issues as they relate to academic areas of interest
e. Opportunities to tap into the expertise of community agencies as co-teachers
f. Identifying areas for research and publication related to current trends and issues.

For the Community

a. Access university resources (human and financial)
b. Positive relationship opportunities with the university
c. Opportunities for contributing to the educational process
d. Affordable access to professional development
For the University
Enhanced teaching, research and outreach activities
a. Facilitates Faculty and students engagement in local and state community issues
b. Increase opportunities to extend university knowledge and resources
c. Increased development and preparation of university graduates
d. Access to wisdom and experience as co-lecturers.

The above mentioned benefits relate directly to the strategic plans, mission statement, vision and philosophy of many universities in Nigeria. Teaching, advising, research, scholarship, outreach and the university community can all be enhanced through student and department/faculty involvement in community service-learning.

Service Learning Models
A number of models do exist to implement service-learning. For this paper, the following alternative models are applicable:

Integrated model
This model is faculty-centered. A faculty member takes ownership of the whole process of integrating the service learning components into the curriculum, identifying community partners, conducting the reflection experiences and evaluating the participating students. This model is the most widely practiced in service-learning and is hereby recommended for the service learning programs.

One-credit supplemental model
This model is a one-credit service-learning practicum that can be paired with any two- or three credit lecture course. It gives a few students, in a course the opportunity to be involved in service-learning rather than have the whole class (students) participation. Few hours are given for service-learning requirements during the semester. Here, service learning is taken as an elective course.

Problem-based model
In this model, students (or teams of students) relate to the community as much as "Consultants" working for a "Client". Students work with community members to understand a particular community need or problem. The model presumes that the students will have some experience they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to the problem.

Pure Model
This model assumes that there are existing courses that send students out into the community to serve. These courses have, as their intellectual core, the idea of service to engaged citizens. The courses are not typically lodged in any of our disciplines.

Undergraduate community-based action research model
In this model, students are required to work closely with department/faculty members to learn research methodology while serving as advocates for communities. This is similar to an independent study option for rare students who are highly experienced in community work.

Service Learning Projects
Service Learning (students) projects may include the following:
a. Establishing a business plan for local business organizations in the community
c. Working on a variety of service projects for children in primary and secondary schools especially those in JS1 to JS3 and possibly coaching students in SS11 classes.
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d. Working on projects for the elderly, the economically disadvantaged, and those who are physically challenged and disassociated.

e. Environmental protection awareness

While service learning lectures take place in the University Lecture Halls for students, projects are carried out on-site. Students will be transported via University bus to the project site doing office hours. The frequency of visits would depend on the nature of projects, their location and the needs of the organizations. The sources of funding for service learning may include the following: Students fund raising activities, students levies, the university, aids and grants from organizations and individuals. The other part of the review is on behavior transformation.

Behavior Transformation

Behavior is a range of action and mannerisms made by organizations, system, or artificial entities in conjunction with their environment, which includes the other systems or organisms around as well the physical environment. It is their spouse of the system (organism) to various stimuli or inputs, whether internal or external, conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary. Human behavior can be common, unusual, acceptable or unacceptable. The acceptability of behavior is evaluated using social norms and by using social control, behavior is regulated. Behavior became an important construct in the early 20th century psychology with the advent of the paradigm known as “behaviorism” behaviorism insisted on working only with what can be seen or manipulated. (Wolseley Slemmer)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Behavior change theories attempt to explain why behaviors change. These theories cite environment, personal and behavior characteristics as the major factors in behavioral determination. In recent years, there has been increased interest in the application of these theories in the areas of health, education, criminology, energy and international development with the hope that understanding behavioral change will improve the services offered in these areas. Some of the models appropriate for this paper include the following: The Trans-theoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM) of Prochaska & DiClemente (1984), Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Theory, Dewey’s (1939) Theory and Skinner’s (1974) Reinforcement Theory.

Trans-theoretical Model of Behavior Change

According to Prochaska & DiClemente (1983), this model assesses an individual’s readiness to act on a new healthier behavior and provides strategies, (process) of change to guide the individual through the stages of change to action and maintenance. It is an integrative, bio-psychosocial model to conceptualize the process of intentional behavior change. The theory seeks to include and integrate key constructs from other theories into a comprehensive theory of change that can be applied to a variety of behaviors, population and settings.

Stages of Behavior Change

This explains when changes in cognition, emotion and behavior take place. Therefore, behavior change can be thought of as occurring as progressive through a series of stages. These stages are as set below.

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation (not ready)

Individuals in this stage are not thinking about orientation to change a problem behavior in the near future. Pre-contemplators are usually aimed with the facts about the risks attempt becoming discouraged and regressing back to the pre-contemplation stage. Individuals in this stage comprise a large proportion of individuals engaged in risky or unhealthy behaviors.

Stage 2: Contemplation (Getting ready)

In this stage, an individual becomes aware of a desire to change a particular behavior. Individuals weigh the pros and cons of changing their behavior. Contemplators also represent a large proportion of individuals engaged in unhealthy behaviors.

Stage 3: Preparation (Ready)

In this stage, the pros in favor of attempting to change a problem behavior outweigh the cons, and action is intended in the near future (given a specific time frame). Many individuals in this stage have made an attempt to change their behavior in the past but
have been unsuccessful in maintaining that change. Preparers often have a plan of action
but may not be entirely committed to their plan

Stage 4: Action
The action stage marks the beginning of actual change in the criterion behavior within a given time. By this
point, an individual is half way through the process of behavior change according to the model. This is also
the point where relapse, and subsequently regressing to an earlier stage, is most likely.

Stage 5: Maintenance
Individuals are said to be in the maintenance stage when they have successfully attained
and maintained behavior change (for at least six months). While the risk for relapse is still
present in this stage, it is less so, and as such individuals need to exert less effort in
engaging in change processes.

The stages of change address a fact of behavior change that change is a process that occurs over time. While
progression through the stages can occur linearly, a non-linear progression is more common. Change can
also come at its own pace quickly an in burst, rather than consistent rate.

Strategies (process) for making and maintaining change
a. Consciousness-Raising: Increasing awareness through information, education, personal feedback
   etc.
b. Dramatic Relief: Feeling inspiration and hope when individual hear about how people are able to
   change to healthy behaviors.
c. Self-Reevaluation: Realizing that the healthy behavior in an important part of who they are and
   want to be.
d. Environmental Reevaluation: Realizing how their unhealthy behavior affects others and how they
   could have more positive effects by changing.
e. Social Liberation: Believing in one’s ability to change and making commitments to act on that
   belief.
f. Helping Relationships: Finding people who are supportive of their change.
g. Counter-Conditioning: Substituting healthy ways of acting and thinking for unhealthy ways.
h. Reinforcement Management: Increasing the rewards that come from positive behaviour and
   reducing those from negative behavior.
i. Stimulus Control: Using reminders and cues that encourage healthy behavior as substitutes for
   those that encourage unhealthy behavior.

Kolb’s Experiential Theory
Kolb theorized that the acquisition of learning is as a result of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly
in a range of situations which may be brought about because of impetus for the development of new
concepts provided by new experiences. Much of this theory is concerned with the learner’s internal
cognitive processes. Learning, as stated by Kolb is the process whereby knowledge is created through the
transformation of experience. The Experiential Learning style theory is typically represented by a four stage
learning cycle in which the learner ‘touches all the bases’. The experiential learning cycle is the major
component of this theory. This cycle is as presented below:
Concrete Experience  
(designing / having an experience)

Active Experimentation  
(planning / trying out what you have learned)

Reflective Observation  
(reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualization  
(concluding / learning from the experience)

Figure 1: The Experiential Learning Cycle.


Concrete Experience (a new experience of situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience), Reflective Observation (of the new experience). Of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding, Abstract Conceptualization (Reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept), and Active Experimentation (the learner applies them to the world around them to see what results).

Kolb further explained that effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages: (a) having a concrete experience followed by (b) observation and reflection on that experience which leads to (c) the formation of abstract concepts (analysis) and generalizations (conclusions), and then (d) used to test hypothesis in future situations, resulting in new experiences. He further states that learning is an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next. It is possible to enter the cycle at any stage and follow it through its logical sequence. However, effective learning only occurs when a learner is able to execute all four stages of the model. Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is an effective as a learning procedure on its own.

Based on the four-style learning cycle, Kolb set out four distinct learning styles. He further explains that different people naturally prefer a certain single different learning style. Various factors influence a person's preferred style: his social environment, educational experiences, the basic cognitive structure of the individual. Whatever influences the choice of style, the learning style preference itself is actually the product of two pairs of variables, or two separate 'choices' that we make, which Kolb presented as lines of axis, each with 'conflicting' modes at either end. A typical presentation of Kolb's two continuums is that the east-west axis is called the **Processing Continuum** (how we approach a task), and the north-south axis is called the **Perception Continuum** (our emotional response, or how we think or feel about it). See the diagram below:
Accommodating (doing and feeling) the accommodations learning style is hands-on, and relies on interaction.

The second type of learners is the concrete-orthographic learner. They learn through visual means. They require clear, concise instruction and need to see the end goal. When teaching concrete-orthographic learners, it is important to provide visual aids, diagrams, and step-by-step instructions. They benefit from seeing the process and understanding the reasoning behind it.

The third type is the auditory verbal learner. They learn through hearing and speaking. They thrive in environments where they can listen and engage in discussions. When teaching auditory-verbal learners, it is important to provide verbal explanations, discussions, and opportunities for them to talk through concepts. They benefit from hearing information and engaging in conversations.

The fourth type is the body-kinesthetic learner. They learn through physical activity and movement. They prefer hands-on learning experiences and benefit from interactive activities. Teaching body-kinesthetic learners involves incorporating physical activities, role-playing, and hands-on projects.

The fifth type is the reflective-collaborative learner. They learn through thinking and reflecting. They need time to process information and benefit from small group discussions and collaborative learning. Teaching reflective-collaborative learners involves facilitating open discussions, group projects, and reflection exercises.

The sixth type is the sequential-mathematical learner. They learn through logical reasoning and problem-solving. They benefit from structured, step-by-step instructions and opportunities to solve problems. Teaching sequential-mathematical learners involves providing logical explanations, step-by-step instructions, and problem-solving activities.

The seventh type is the global-intuitive learner. They learn through holistic thinking and big picture perspectives. They benefit from seeing the connections between concepts and understanding the bigger picture. Teaching global-intuitive learners involves providing overviews, connections between concepts, and opportunities to see the bigger picture.

The eighth type is the random-creative learner. They learn through exploring and experimenting. They thrive in environments where they can try different approaches and experiment with ideas. Teaching random-creative learners involves providing opportunities to experiment, try different approaches, and encourage creative thinking.

The ninth type is the social-expressive learner. They learn through interacting with others and expressing their ideas. They benefit from collaborative learning and opportunities to share their ideas with others. Teaching social-expressive learners involves facilitating group discussions, collaborative projects, and opportunities to express their ideas.

The tenth type is the visual-spacial learner. They learn through visual information and imagery. They benefit from visual aids, diagrams, and opportunities to visualize concepts. Teaching visual-spacial learners involves using visual aids, diagrams, and opportunities to visualize concepts.

The eleventh type is the analytical-verbal learner. They learn through analytical thinking and verbal expression. They benefit from analytical explanations, discussions, and opportunities to express their ideas verbally. Teaching analytical-verbal learners involves providing analytical explanations, discussions, and opportunities to express their ideas verbally.

The twelve model is a comprehensive, flexible, and adaptable framework for understanding the diverse learning styles of individuals. It recognizes that people have different learning preferences and provides a way to accommodate these preferences in teaching and learning. The model encourages educators to be aware of their own learning style and to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate the diverse learning styles of their students.
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rely on others for information than carry out their own analysis. This learning style is prevalent within the general population. Both Kolb’s (1984) learning stages and cycle could be used by teachers to critically evaluate the learning provision typically available to students and to develop more appropriate learning opportunities. Educators should ensure that service learning and other activities are designed and carried out in ways that offer each learner the chance to engage in the manner that suits them best. Also, individuals can be helped to learn more effectively by the identification of their lesser preferred learning styles and the strengthening of these through the application of the experiential learning cycle. Ideally, activities and materials should be developed in ways that draw on abilities from each stage of the experiential learning cycle and take the students through the whole process in sequence.

DEWEY’S CONTACT THEORY

This theory according to Dewey (1938) in Erickson and Santmire (2001) has a strong basis in psychological theory and practice and considers service learning as having a tremendous potential to affect learners in ways other than former learning. The theory anchors on experience and learning which also formed the foundation of experiential education. The theory assumes that learning through experience is superior to less engaging forms of learning. This theory forms the core of service learning’s basis formulation and all bases for evaluating what is appropriate service learning practice. Service learning and behavior change is also linked to the contact theory (contact hypothesis). This theory sought to find ways to understand and evaluate the various conditions under which face to face contact would promote greater personal and social understanding between members of different groups. Here service learning is regarded as an attitude transformation tool. Factors under which inhibits or reduces prejudices in contact theory are: equal status contact pursuit of common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, customs or law. (Allport, 1954)

(a) The extent to which both the service provider and recipient of service have comparatively equal amount of social status.

(b) Refer to the characters of the task on which both service provider and recipient are working. Take cases of a football team were different people from different social groups performing differentiated task in pursuit of a common goal. When the affiliation between provider and recipient is authentically in pursuit of common goals, real behavior transformation occurs.

(c) The manner in which service participants first identify as ethnicity, political affiliation or nationality. Here it is assumed that once one’s in group identity is salient the service participant must recognize others’ group (out-group) identity and perceive a constructive cooperative relationship between in-group and out-group.

(d) The support of authorities’ social custom or laws must be promoted positive contact between out-group members. This support could be in the form of special out-reach programs such as structured diversity training, laws against discrimination, special initiatives from a business, religion or fraternity organizations.

Dovidio, Glick and Rudman (2005) added the ‘long term’ contact. According to them, because of practical logistics of doing service learning educational settings (academic terms, transportation issues, students turn over and so on), many service activities are short in duration and may isolate this conditions. Therefore, without long-term contact (in intensity or duration), service relationship can actually increase the degree and severity of behavior transformation. As stated earlier service learning has the potential to influence students’ behaviors and beliefs especially toward diversity, social justice and other pro-social attitude (Delve, Mintz and Stewart (1990)

REINFORCEMENT THEORY

Reinforcement theory (Operant conditioning) describes the consequence that motivates individuals either to continue or discontinue behavior. It is a process of controlling behavior by manipulating its consequences. Most behaviors as argued by Skinner (1974), are learned and maintained under fairly complex schedules of reinforcement and anticipated future rewards. These rewards may include physical consequences, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and so on. Skinner cautioned that although providing praise, encouragement and other extrinsic rewards may help people adopt positive lifestyle behavior, such reinforcement may not be reliable for sustained long-term behavior (www.campusmA.edu/~jgirizell/bestpractical/behavior...). Unlike other motivation theories that seek to explain the “why” behavior, reinforcement theory by contrast, views human behavior as determined by its environmental consequences. It focuses on the external environment.
and the consequences it holds for the individual. Once behavior is positively reinforced or rewarded by environmental consequences, such behavior becomes more likely to occur in the future, (Scherm.Serializable 1984). The basic foundation of reinforcement theory lies in Thorndike's (1911,244) law of effect which states that "behavior that results in a pleasant outcome is likely to be repeated; behavior that results in an unpleasant outcome is not likely to be repeated". The theory suggests ways of improving performance by clarifying goals, providing performance feedback and properly administering rewards.

CONCLUSION

Service learning which combines classroom, community service and guided reflections has the potentials to influence unhealthy behaviors to more satisfying behaviors. This is because it emphasizes the education of the whole individual to make decisions and to take action and embark on activities in the real world. The learning outcomes in service learning is about passing knowledge to someone else and the person to whom knowledge is passed onto makes use of such knowledge to change behavior form negative to positive. Service learning seeks to promote the concept of good citizenship. The paper sought to establish a theoretical link between service learning and behavior transformation especially among participants. Relevant literatures were consulted on service learning, its goals, value addition to participants, models, partners and student projects. Issues covered in behavior transformation include theories of behavior as proposed by Prochaska & DeClemente, Kolb, Dewey, and Skinner. Based on the preceding, recommendations were made for further improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a) Service learning pedagogy should meet certain necessary conditions to have strong basis for successful transformation of behavior of participants (students).

b) Service learning should also include continuous evaluation of the extent to which service learning is implemented and the accomplishment of both the service and learning objectives. The evaluation should allow a richer and rigorous examination of the effect of service learning on student (participant) behavior and measured over a time frame.

c) To enhance knowledge and transform the attitude of participants, it should be conducted in the context of an academic discipline and in a manner that applies the powerful social and cognitive psychological principles and appropriate strategies sought for further improvements.

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