

INTEGRATING SERVICE LEARNING, CIVIC VALUES, AND CIVIC SELF-EFFICACY IN THE CONTEXT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Universities are increasingly expected to produce graduates who exhibit both robust academic abilities and a dedication to civic responsibility. This expectation holds particular importance for postgraduate students who are gearing up for leadership positions in education, government, and various professional fields. This research investigated the influence of service learning on the cultivation of civic values and the enhancement of self confidence in civic engagement among postgraduate students within the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 28 students involved in service-learning projects to evaluate these characteristics. The findings revealed that service learning played a significant role in fostering civic values and boosting students' confidence in engaging in civic activities. Additionally, the study discovered that ongoing participation and reflective involvement in service-learning initiatives promoted the development of civic identity, social responsibility, and ethical consciousness among students. These results imply that incorporating service learning into postgraduate curricula is a viable approach to enhancing civic competences and equipping graduates to meet societal demands.

Keywords: service learning, civic values, civic self-efficacy, postgraduate students, civic engagement, higher education, Nigeria

Introduction

Universities are increasingly acknowledged not only as hubs for intellectual growth but also as vital spaces for nurturing socially responsible individuals who can contribute to democracy and community progress. This role is especially crucial at the postgraduate level, where students are equipped for advanced professional, academic, and leadership positions. Service-Learning serves to connect academic study with societal requirements by merging community

service with academic teaching and structured reflection. This hands-on approach allows students to utilise classroom knowledge to tackle real-world social issues (Bringle & Hatcher, 2023). In addition to academic benefits, service learning promotes the cultivation of civic identity, which includes civic knowledge, values, and self-efficacy (Steinberg et al., 2011).

Service Learning embodies a progressive educational approach that merges academic instruction with community needs by fusing

classroom education and significant service to the community. Grounded in the principles of experiential learning, service learning provides organised opportunities for students to participate in community-oriented activities and to thoughtfully reflect on these experiences in connection with academic material (Jarvis, 2012). This process enables students to cultivate both subject-specific knowledge and civic skills, such as empathy, social responsibility, leadership, and collaborative problem-solving (Celio, C. I., et.al., 2011).

Service learning enables students to apply classroom knowledge to real social problems while engaging in reflective practice, thereby enhancing critical thinking, empathy, and civic responsibility (Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E., 2019) in the process. The connection between education and service has historical roots in the philosophies of Aristotle and Locke, who emphasised the social purpose of education. Dewey (1938) further developed experiential learning theory, advocating for active participation and community engagement as essential components of education. Dewey's framework underpins the conceptualisation of service learning as a transformative approach in higher education (Ahmad & Gul, 2023).

Empirical studies conducted globally support the effectiveness of service learning. Research indicates that students who participate in service learning demonstrate improved academic performance, enhanced leadership skills, and increased civic engagement compared to those in traditional educational settings (Brail, 2016). In Nigeria, service learning has been implemented through initiatives targeting environmental management, governance, and social development. These programmes have reportedly enhanced students' civic knowledge, empathy, values of cooperation, and civic responsibility (Olagoke-Oladokun et.al., 2020).

Blomeley and Hamilton (2022) contend that, although service learning is typically unpaid, it equips future employees with essential skills. Scholars suggest that greater integration between work and education is likely to enhance the quality of the Nigerian workforce (Olagoke-Oladokun et al., 2018). Through daily interactions and academic experiences, students can use service-learning as a pedagogical strategy to address community challenges. Researchers have further proposed that service learning can facilitate the delivery of educational concepts, including those in technology and education, or be incorporated as a specialised course within university curricula (Guo et al., 2016).

Gbadamosi (2022) identified service learning as a framework for experiential education, merging theory with practice by enabling students to participate in community service that addresses local needs. This process is complemented by reflective classroom discussions that deepen students' understanding of course content (Resch, K., & Schrittmesser, I., 2023).

Furthermore, service learning operates as an experiential learning mechanism that encourages students to engage in meaningful community service and reflect on their contributions. This process reinforces personal values and civic responsibilities, enhances understanding of academic subjects, and broadens areas of expertise (Olagoke-Oladokun et.al., 2020).

Civic values represent the moral and affective dimensions of civic identity, shaping individuals' attitudes, commitments, and behaviors in public life (Youniss, 2011). These values encompass empathy, social responsibility, respect for diversity, ethical conduct, and a commitment to justice and the common good. While civic knowledge can be acquired through formal education, civic values are typically

developed through lived experiences, social interactions, and reflective practices.

Self-efficacy is the belief a person has in their ability to complete tasks successfully. Bandura (1977), who developed the most extensive theory on self-efficacy, defined perceived self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to organise and carry out the necessary actions to achieve a goal. According to Bandura (1982), a person's perceived self-efficacy influences the actions they are prepared to take concerning their goals, the variety of goals they pursue, and the level of effort they invest in those pursuits. He noted that participation in various forms of civic engagement requires more than just knowledge; it also necessitates a belief in one's own capabilities. Research examining the predictive capacity of thoughts and beliefs, such as knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs, has identified self-efficacy as the most significant predictor of attitudes toward civic engagement.

Service learning is gaining prominence in higher education as an innovative approach that deepens understanding of course material and shapes students' perspectives on social issues, community challenges, and civic engagement (Chola, 2016). When effectively integrated into educational institutions, service learning can significantly promote positive civic attitudes among students. In Nigeria, universities are increasingly expected to engage with their surrounding communities. The University of Ibadan has assumed a leading role in promoting community engagement and service-learning initiatives to enhance civic responsibility among students (Lawal, 2024, Tribune Online 2024).

However, empirical research examining the effect of service learning on the civic values of postgraduate students remains limited. To address this gap, the present study investigates the influence of service learning on civic values and civic self-efficacy among postgraduate students

in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education at the University of Ibadan.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria faces ongoing challenges related to low civic responsibility, limited community engagement, and insufficient awareness of the consequences of individual and collective actions for national development. Although civic education is included in formal curricula, evidence indicates that conventional, predominantly theoretical, lecture-based teaching methods have not effectively fostered students' practical civic competences. This shortcoming is especially significant at the postgraduate level, where individuals are expected to assume leadership roles in society.

Service learning is recognised as an experiential pedagogical approach that bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application by integrating academic instruction with meaningful community engagement and reflective practice. Although previous studies have documented the general benefits of service learning, there is limited empirical research on its specific impact on civic values and civic self-efficacy among postgraduate students, particularly in the Nigerian context.

Given the growing importance of civic participation in both physical and digital environments, it is necessary to understand how service learning contributes to the development of students' civic dispositions and confidence in addressing societal issues. Accordingly, this study examines the relationship between service learning, civic values, and civic self-efficacy among postgraduate students in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study is guided by these following research questions:

- How has service-learning impacted the civic values of postgraduate students?
- To what degree do postgraduate students exhibit civic self-efficacy following their participation in service-learning?

Methodology

This research utilized a Survey Quantitative methodology to assess civic values and civic self-efficacy via a structured questionnaire. The population for this study consisted of intact classes of postgraduate students from the Faculty of Education, Arts, and Social Sciences at the University of Ibadan, all of whom had participated in service-learning activities as part of their academic curriculum. A sample of 28 participants was selected for this survey. The researcher created a self-structured questionnaire that incorporated two scales: Civic Values and Civic Self-efficacy. The reliability of the instruments was evaluated using the Cronbach alpha method, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.76.

The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistical methods, such as frequency counts and simple percentages, were applied to investigate the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the research question. To address the research questions and test the null hypothesis at a significance level of $p < 0.05$, inferential statistical techniques including the t-test and regression analysis were employed.

Results

Research Question 1: How has service-learning impacted the civic values of postgraduate students?

Table 1: *Service-Learning impacted Civic Values of Postgraduate Students*

ITEMS	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD
1.	Citizens are obligated to actively participate in advancing their community	9 (32.1%)	18 (64.3%)	0	1 (3.6%)	3.29	0.54
2.	Respect for individuals from diverse backgrounds is fundamental to achieving civic unity.	12 (42.9%)	7 (25%)	7 (25%)	2 (7.1%)	2.86	1.24
3.	Civic life is strengthened by equitable decision-making processes.	7 (25%)	9 (32.1%)	6 (21.4%)	6 (21.4%)	2.61	1.10
4.	Helping others is a real sign of civic responsibility.	10 (35.7%)	14 (50%)	1 (3.6%)	3 (10.7%)	3.18	0.77
5.	When we respond to the challenges others face, our community becomes stronger.	10 (35.7%)	7 (25%)	6 (21.4%)	5 (17.9%)	2.75	1.18
6.	Volunteering is a great way to practice civic responsibility.	13 (46.4%)	11 (39.3%)	3 (10.7%)	1 (3.6%)	3.21	0.96
7.	Patriotism matters most when people fulfill their civic duties.	12 (42.9%)	13 (46.4%)	1 (3.6%)	2 (7.1%)	3.29	0.76
8.	Service-learning helps people act honestly when working to improve society.	10 (35.7%)	14 (50%)	0	4 (14.3%)	3.21	0.69
9.	Civic growth happens when people respect the rule of law.	9 (32.1%)	7 (25%)	8 (28.6%)	4 (14.3%)	2.61	1.23
10.	Solving civic problems requires people to work together.	14 (50%)		0	3 (10.7%)	3.39	0.69

Weighted mean = 3.04

Threshold = 2.50

Note, SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree with Criterion mean of 2.50

Table 1 presents the impact of service learning on postgraduate students' civic values. The overall weighted mean was 3.04, exceeding the criterion mean of 2.50. This result indicates that most respondents agreed that service learning contributes to the development of civic values. Among the individual items, the highest mean score was observed for "Solving civic problems requires people to work together." (M = 3.39), reflecting strong agreement regarding the importance of teamwork in civic engagement. Respondents also expressed strong agreement with the statements "Citizens are obligated to actively participate in advancing their community" (M = 3.29) and "Patriotism matters most when people fulfill their civic duties" (M = 3.29).

In summary, the results indicate that service learning is associated with enhanced civic values among postgraduate students. These findings suggest that service learning positively influences the civic values of postgraduate students.

Research Question 2: To what degree do postgraduate students exhibit civic self-efficacy following their participation in service-learning?

ITEMS	STATEMENT	HE	ME	LE	NA	M	SD
1.	Service-learning increases confidence in contributing to community solutions.	13 (46.4%)	15 (53.6%)	0	0	3.46	0.51
2.	Meaningful contributions to civic life can be made through service-learning.	9 (32.1%)	10 (35.7%)	2 (7.1%)	7 (25%)	2.75	1.18
3.	Service-learning provides little confidence to take initiative in civic matters.	12 (42.9%)	8 (28.6%)	3 (10.7%)	5 (17.9%)	2.96	1.14
4.	Service-learning improves belief in the ability to influence decisions in the community.	9 (32.1%)	8 (28.6%)	6 (21.4%)	5 (17.9%)	2.75	1.11
5.	Service-learning does not build confidence to work with others in solving problems.	18 (64.3%)	6 (21.4%)	3 (10.7%)	1 (3.6%)	3.46	0.84
6.	Service-learning helps in developing leadership skills for community service.	10 (35.7%)	10 (35.7%)	7 (25%)	1 (3.6%)	3.04	0.88
7.	Service-learning develops problem-solving abilities for civic challenges.	9 (32.1%)	7 (25%)	4 (14.3%)	8 (28.6%)	2.61	1.23
8.	Service-learning has developed the skill to analyse and identify pressing social problems.	13 (46.4%)	13 (46.4%)	2 (7.1%)	0	3.39	0.63
9.	Service-learning has developed the ability to evaluate the results of civic initiatives.	6 (21.4%)	11 (39.3%)	6 (21.4%)	5 (17.9%)	2.64	1.03
10.	Service-learning has enhanced the ability to apply knowledge in solving civic-related challenges.	11 (39.3%)	8 (28.6%)	4 (14.3%)	5 (17.9%)	2.89	1.13

Table 2: Degree of Postgraduate Students' Civic Self-efficacy following Service-Learning

Weighted mean = 3.0

Threshold = 2.50

Table 2 presents the degree to which postgraduate students exhibit civic self-efficacy following participation in service-learning. The weighted mean of 3.0 surpasses the established threshold of 2.50. These findings suggest that postgraduate students exhibit a moderate to high level of civic self-efficacy after engaging in service-learning.

Discussion of Findings

According to Table 1, service learning appears to enhance civic values of postgraduate students, with a weighted mean of 3.04 against the threshold of 2.50. These statistics show that students demonstrated strong moral and civic commitments such as responsibility, fairness, collaboration, respect for others, and volunteerism after service learning. The findings are in line with (Geier & Hasager, 2020) which concluded that service learning reinforces democratic awareness and civic attitudes and Gbadamosi (2018) which concluded that reflective service learning promotes empathy and fairness.

Moreover, the findings of this study align with those of Sun et al. (2023) and VAL-U (2022), who concluded that service learning facilitates the development of civic identity and measurable ethical values among students. Overall, service learning enhances the civic values of postgraduate students, fostering social responsibility, empathy, and community engagement. These findings suggest that service learning is an effective method for instilling and promoting active learning in higher education programmes.

Results in Table 2 indicate that postgraduate students demonstrated moderate to high levels of civic self-efficacy following service-learning participation, as evidenced by a weighted mean of 3.0, exceeding the threshold of 2.50. These findings suggest that service-learning

experiences increased students' confidence in their ability to contribute to community problem-solving, influence civic decision-making, and respond effectively to social issues.

These results are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory as developed by Bandura (1997), which identifies mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional regulation as primary sources of self-efficacy. Through active engagement in service-learning, postgraduate students participated in real-life community projects, applied theoretical knowledge to societal challenges, and reflected on their experiences, all of which contributed to enhanced civic confidence. This observation is further supported by empirical evidence from Reeb (2010), who demonstrated that participation in organised community projects and assuming leadership or mentorship roles significantly increases civic self-efficacy.

Similarly, this study found that service-learning activities increased postgraduate students' confidence in their ability to lead and collaborate within community settings. For example, items such as 'Service-learning enhances confidence in addressing community challenges' and 'Service-learning helps build leadership skills in serving the community' received high mean scores, indicating increased confidence in civic engagement.

Furthermore, the results indicate that participation in reflective learning processes enabled students to transform their experiences into practical skills. Reflection constitutes a critical component of service-learning, enabling learners to internalise lessons from community interactions and recognize their potential impact on societal outcomes. This finding supports Reeb's (2010) assertion that mastery and feedback experiences are effective predictors of higher civic self-efficacy; students who perceive

their actions as effective are more likely to sustain civic engagement. The results also indicate that postgraduate students developed leadership, analytical, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for civic participation. Consistent with the findings of Eyler and Giles (1999), who demonstrated that service-learning cultivates critical civic skills, these competences empower students to act as change agents within their communities. Enhanced self-belief subsequently fosters greater social responsibility, a willingness to participate in decision-making, and sustained community involvement. In conclusion, service-learning is an effective approach for developing civic self-efficacy among postgraduate students, as it provides valuable, context-based experiences that enhance confidence, leadership potential, and civic participation. Through active involvement and reflection, students acquire not only academic knowledge but also a lasting belief in their capacity to effect positive change within their communities. Consequently, service-learning represents a transformative pedagogical strategy that prepares students to become responsible citizens and leaders.

Conclusion

The study found that service learning helps postgraduate students in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education at the University of Ibadan develop civic values and civic self-efficacy. By taking part in hands-on learning and reflecting on community activities, these students improved their civic knowledge, adopted civic values, and became more confident in their civic roles. The results show that service learning connects academic training with real-world needs, helping to create responsible citizens and future leaders. In this way, service learning is not just a teaching method but also a process that encourages active citizenship and moral

responsibility, both of which are important for sustainable national development.

Recommendations

- ❖ Teachers are urged to embrace participatory pedagogical models such as service learning that aid critical thinking, collaboration and reflection and enhance the students' understanding of civic ideas and their problem-solving skills in solving community problems.
- ❖ Regular workshops, training, and seminars should be organised by the government and educational stakeholders to prepare lecturers with the necessary skills to design and implement effective service-learning projects to different universities.
- ❖ Government and private organisations should provide financial assistance, grants, and incentives to facilitate the implementation of service-learning programs and civic engagement initiatives in tertiary institutions. It is advisable that service learning should be incorporated into postgraduate programmes to ease the connection between classroom theory and real community problems in order to increase civic engagement, social responsibility and equip graduates with skills to be active citizens.
- ❖ Policymakers in education must come up with structures that will entrench service learning as a fundamental aspect of civic and social education in Nigerian universities with focus on continuity and sustainability in terms of their effect on civic identity.

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