Service-Learning as a Means to Promote Development of Social Responsibility Competency in a Department of Economics and Business

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The methodological approach of service-learning has been used since 2009 by the Department of Economics and Business at the University of Chile to promote, on the one hand, vocational training for students facing problematic and real environmental challenges, and, on the other hand, to develop students' social responsibility competence. This article compares the results of an initial survey (pretest) and final survey (posttest) of students participating in courses containing service-learning regarding their perceptions of their expected and actual achievement of social responsibility-related competencies. Items associated with information collected from community partners, and the estimation of economic impacts, despite showing a slight decrease, showed no statistical significance. The remaining items of the instrument revealed a slight decrease. Service-learning practices aligned with those embedded in the department's curricular vocational training plan, confirming the need to further strengthen the institutionalization of service-learning and to seek new methodological strategies to develop social responsibility competencies within programs focused on training professionals.

Keywords: social responsibility, service learning, generic skills, higher education

Over the last decade, the higher education system in Chile, along with the rest of Latin America, has embraced the global trend of shifting the content of vocational training toward a more student-centered approach (Proyecto Tuning, 2007). In this sense, a college education focuses on developing students' capacity to mobilize both the knowledge and skills needed to respond to various diverse challenges in their personal, social, and work environment (Jerez, 2015). Standards-based curricula were developed with the acknowledgement that not only are disciplinary skills important in vocational training, but there are also general, transversal competencies to take into account. Among these transversal competencies is social responsibility, whose importance in Chile has been increasing due to various ethical, social, and environmental scandals.

To develop students' skills in general, it has become necessary for universities to introduce active teaching and learning methodologies. Globally, one of the methodologies used most often to develop social responsibility and ethics-related competencies has been the pedagogy of service-learning, which began to be defined in the 1980s. Generally speaking, service-learning is an educational experience centering on a curricular activity through which students receive academic credit and participate in an organized service activity that is based on real community needs and through which both the students and community partners benefit from the experience (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Sigmon, 1979).

This article presents the results of a study regarding the development of social responsibility competence among undergraduate students of the Department of Economics and Business (in Spanish, *Facultad de Economía y Negocios*, or FEN) at the University of Chile who participated in service-

learning. To accomplish this, an initial survey (pretest) and a final survey (posttest) were designed to assess changes in students' self-perception regarding skills associated with developing social responsibility competence after participating in a course that included service-learning.

The first section of this article provides the context for the service-learning methodology, followed by a discussion of the implementation of the service-learning model used in the FEN at the University of Chile. The instrument and its validity and reliability along with relevant data about the sample are then presented. The last sections present the results, final conclusions, and possible lines of future research.

Social Responsibility and Service-Learning

Although there are different definitions of service-learning, most of them contain similar components: (1) effective learning and quality of conceptual content, procedures, and attitudes related to the curriculum; and (2) the service and community work leading to the transformation of the community (Francisco & Moliner, 2010; Tapia, 2010). The first service-learning experiences have roots in the United States, in the pedagogy of John Dewey and the philosophy of William James (Francisco & Moliner, 2010). Always conceived of as a pedagogical innovation, service-learning began its gestation in the early 1920s but took its first steps toward positioning in 1963 at the first National Conference on Service-Learning in the United States. This conference presented service-learning as a prerequisite for educational growth (Francisco & Moliner, 2010).

In Latin America, the underlying values of service-learning are as old as the original community natives. There were important university movements that envisioned the need for engagement between academia and society. Since the 19th century, the influence of "social service" (*servicio social*) on Latin American education has been profound, starting with the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and followed soon after by the university reform movement that grew out of Argentina in 1918 (Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario [CLAYSS], 2014). In Chile, the methodology of service-learning began to be used by many universities to advance projects as part of university social responsibility, such as the "University Builds Country" project in 2001, whose aim was "to expand the concept and practice of social responsibility in the Chilean university system" (Fernández, Delpiano, & De Ferari , 2006).

In general, the growth and implementation of service-learning are characterized by five phases identified by Tapia (2010). The first phase pertains to short-term, sporadic forms of volunteerism, such as assistance that is provided during disaster situations. The second phase refers to the organization of volunteer groups that perform service within more medium-term contexts. The third phase is characterized by the creation of voluntary activities organized institutionally—that is, the wing or units of institutions that support and facilitate processes necessary for the fulfillment of these activities. The fourth phase is related to the approach to learning and service activities within the academic and educational contexts. Finally, the fifth phase relates to intensive community service programs (either mandatory or voluntary) that take place over several months (CLAYSS, 2014).

In the field of higher education, service-learning is related to a specific pedagogical form of social intervention, characterized by youth leadership and by the transfer of goods, services, and knowledge from educational institutions to the community through the active participation of community actors (CLAYSS, 2014). When one speaks of service-learning, one is not merely looking to conduct welfare or charity; rather, the service involves providing partners with knowledge or tools that allow them to better manage their daily actions. Service-learning contributes to generic skills training by combining key elements that include building relationships with the environment, meaningful learning through intentional reflection on practice, and high levels of student participation (Puig, Gijón, Martín, & Rubio, 2011).

The impacts of service-learning have been studied from different perspectives, such as quality education, learning, student achievement (e.g., graduation), and preparation for the labor market, among others. In terms of soft skills or generic skills, service-learning impacts have been associated with ethical

training of students, the development of pro-social attitudes, and training for citizenship (Puig et al., 2011; Tapia, 2010). To ensure students' citizenship development, which involves forming individuals who contribute to the common good and who participate actively in community affairs, it is necessary to incorporate into educational interventions activities through which the search for a common good satisfies a community need (Puig, 2011).

In particular, service-learning pedagogy has been applied to business schools with the aim of developing civic skills (Brower, 2011; Snell, Chan, Ma, & Chan, 2015) and knowledge of sustainable development, the latter of which is required for business (Brower, 2011).

Students develop civic engagement through service-learning when certain conditions, such as infrastructure, relational support, direct contact with community partners, autonomy, and work with real needs, are provided (Snell et al., 2015). Thus, several universities, by developing projects and offering social responsibility programs, have encouraged the curricular incorporation of service-learning, with the clear intention of promoting the development of student' social responsibility competence (Fernández et al., 2006).

Service-Learning in the Faculty of Economics and Business

Since 2013, the Department of Economics and Business at the University of Chile has been in the process of implementing new training workshops in its three undergraduate programs, with a focus on students' central development and the broader general education curriculum (FEN, 2015). In this context, the graduate profiles incorporate social concern, responsibility, civic commitment, and contribution to the national development project.

To support competency-based work, an orientation guide was compiled in 2015 to advance students' generic skills by defining and describing levels of development of generic competencies that the department expects of students (FEN, 2015). In this guide, social responsibility is defined as

> the use of a set of criteria to anticipate impacts and make professional decisions, considering the responsibility of the various stakeholders of society and the balance of economic, environmental, and social development, both to understand the context of a problem of an organization or community and to develop problem solving strategies within the framework of sustainable human development. (FEN, 2015)

Social responsibility consists of two sub-competencies: the involvement of stakeholders and the identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts. Within each of these sub-competencies, there are training cycles that provide key elements that shape the level of performance: the basic cycle (first two years of training), the discipline cycle (third and fourth year), and the professional cycle (fifth year).

To operationalize the development of generic skills in undergraduate training, the department created a manual that operationalizes its terms of ethics and social responsibility (FEN, 2016), taking into account three dimensions for action in forming such competencies, namely training curriculum, institutional environment, and social and work environment. Specifically, the dimension of training curriculum includes all professional curricular training, discipline-based activities that are preset in the curriculum, and internal development of ethical and social responsibility skills (FEN, 2016).

Regarding social responsibility, the main strategy used in the cycle is the implementation of a disciplinary methodological approach—service-learning—within required courses of the curriculum. This ensures that all students participate in a service-learning experience on at least one occasion during their training. In this sense, it seeks to link academic learning with the needs of the national community by engaging students as consultants for community partners in six curricular programs, such as micro and small businesses, social organizations, and foundations. In this experience, there is bidirectionality, in

which learning arises from the connection between theory and practice (Fara, García, Rojas, & Saavedra,, 2015).

The effectiveness of the services performed in the context of a service-learning course depends in part on the ability to identify the needs of the community in which the work is intended to take place (Puig et al., 2011). In this sense, to carry out a service-learning project successfully, it is necessary to mobilize in students several sub-competency elements related to the participating stakeholders, which include validating the stakeholders, recognizing their needs, and considering their context (FEN, 2015).

While the methodology of service-learning has been used within the department since 2006, based mainly on the faculty members and instructors' personal motivations, it has received institutional-level support since 2009. This allowed, on the one hand, to further institutionalize service-learning and, on the other, to progressively increase the number of courses and students who have passed through this initiative, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Courses that Implemented Service-Learning, 2009-2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Number of Courses	2	5	7	9	11	7	4	45
Number of Sections	3	8	11	19	17	14	7	79
Number of Participating Students	83	223	334	726	621	596	293	2.876

Note. Source: Elaboración propia.

The institutional model within FEN incorporates the support of two units of the "Schools for Undergraduates" (*Escuelas de Pregrado*) that accompany teaching teams and community partners to achieve the intended social responsibility outcomes and offer a quality service to the community. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CEA) is responsible for providing support to teachers who want to implement service-learning within their courses, while the Nexus of Social Responsibility University (NexoRSU) is responsible for the partnership, selection, and monitoring of community partners, and supports teachers working with community stakeholders (Fara et al., 2015). The partnership work is based on an implementation model of service-learning in which professional teams from both aforementioned units, made up of teachers, students and community members, interact. The model includes five stages: recruiting and selecting community partners, three reflection milestones, and a closing stage (see Table 2).

Table 2. Implementation Model of Service-Learning in FEN

Stages	Recruiting & Selecting	Reflective Milestone 1	Reflective Milestone 2	Reflective Milestone 3	Closing
Activities	Syllabus preparation based on competence RS	Firm Commitments	Review Progress Advisory	Delivery of Final Consultation Product and Final Presentations	Training of Community Partners
	Profile Definition and Selection of Community Partners	Reflection on RS	Reflection on RS	Final Reflection based on RS	Course Closing Ceremony S+L
	Initial Meeting: Teacher and Community Partners Teams	Pre-Test SL Survey: Community Partners & Students	Advisory Process Evaluation to Date	Post-test SL Survey: S+L Community Partners & Students	Certificate of Participation: Community Partners

Note. Source: Adapted from Fara et al., 2015

The implementation model is a continuum in which each stage includes awareness, reflection, and evaluation of the development of students' social responsibility competence. It is important to note what goes into the process, the reflection spaces for fulfilling agreed-upon commitments, the completed work, and the development of competencies. This process allows students to conduct a more complex analysis in order to derive better solutions to the challenges posed by community partners (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Between 2009 and 2015, students benefited a total of 579 organizations, of which 96 were non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, or the Public Service Governmental Office of Chile (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of Beneficiaries from Use of Service-Learning Methodology, 2009-2015

Type of Organization	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Total NGO´s/ Foundations/ Public Service	0	0	7	23	26	30	10	96
Microenterprises	36	83	65	40	49	52	29	354
Small Businesses	0	4	12	28	27	28	1	100
Medium/Large Businesses	0	0	6	17	6	0	0	29
Total Businesses	36	87	83	85	82	80	30	483
Total Organizations	36	87	90	108	108	110	40	579

Note. Source: Elaboración propia.

Methodology for the Measurement of Social Responsibility Competence and Satisfaction with Service-Learning

Instrument

To implement the service-learning model in FEN, it was necessary to develop tools in order to measure the development of students' social responsibility competence. Similarly, it became necessary to evaluate the implementation of the model in terms of the contribution of this methodological approach to student learning and overall satisfaction.

Along these lines, a self-report questionnaire was generated in 2014 and distributed to students at the beginning and final stages of their service-learning course, specifically during reflective milestones 1 and 3. This assessment tool was designed from the main theoretical postulates of service-learning, as evidenced by the impacts of research in the field, comprising two major dimensions: assessing social responsibility competence development and implementing the methodology (Fara et al., 2015). The questionnaire consisted of 22 Likert-scale questions and 15 ranked items, of which two were focused on the development of social responsibility competence areas. With the 2015 publication of the FEN *Generic Skills Coach*, it became necessary to update the instrument measuring the generic skills of the faculty. In this context, a process began in which the instrument used hitherto was reviewed and reformulated. After

reviewing the instrument, it was decided to reconstruct the corresponding social responsibility competence items to respond more accurately to the definition contained in the orientation guide.

To construct new items, there first needed to be an identification of the performance level of social responsibility competence expected of students pursuing service-learning courses. In this case, they corresponded to a series of discipline-based training courses; the instrument was updated to consider the level of performance expected in these courses. A nine-item Likert scale encompassing two sub-skills (i.e., stakeholder involvement, and identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts) was developed, ensuring that the nine items fully covered all the elements within these constructs. Of these, six items corresponded to the sub-competence of stakeholder involvement, and three responded to competition identification of social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Validity and reliability of the instrument

To assess the validity and reliability of the instrument, three actions were performed. First, once the items were produced, we proceeded to validate the instrument via CEA professional experts who had supported service-learning courses but who had not participated in the creation of the instrument. As a result of this validation, it was necessary to modify some of the items to make them consistent with concrete practices carried out during the advisory process. Similarly, the semantics of the items were revised to make them as clear and understandable as possible for the students.

Second, in relation to the validation of the instrument, a reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This statistic was calculated for each of the dimensions of the instrument, given that the instrument was used to measure different factors. For the dimension (factor) of generic skills, which included the construct of social responsibility, the resulting alphas were .932 and .554 for the pretest and posttest, respectively. In the case of the posttest-only dimension that focused on the implementation of service-learning methodological approach, the resulting alpha was .998.

Third, regarding content validity, an analysis was performed by a panel of experts and teachers who participated in service-learning implementation. Construct validity was evaluated through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which for the pretest data resulted in a six-factor model explaining 45.5% of the variance (whereby four factors focused on the dimension of expectations of the methodology and two factors for social responsibility). For the posttest, the EFA resulted in a three-factor model explaining 70.25% of the variance (whereby one factor focused on the satisfaction methodology and implementation, and two factors emerged for generic skills).

Analysis

Each question on the instrument consisted of a statement for which students answered their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). For the purposes of analysis, the scale assigned a score to each response (see Table 4), which allowed us to calculate average scores for levels of satisfaction.

Table 4. Likert-Scale Options

Response	Rating
"Strongly Disagree"	1
"Disagree"	2
"Agree"	3
Strongly Agree	4

The assigned scores were used to calculate an indicator of satisfaction, with values between 0 (0%) and 1 (100%). The following formula was used (where X = the student's response):

$$\text{Indicator of Satisfaction} = \frac{X - 1}{4 - 1}$$

All scores equal to or greater than 0.5 (50%) were interpreted as positive results, while results lower than 0.5 (50%) were interpreted negatively. The results were interpreted according to the scores obtained as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Indicator Level

[0-0.20]	Level of Satisfaction/ very low development	[0.60-0.80]	Level of Satisfaction/ high development
[0.20-0.40]	Level of Satisfaction/ low development		
[0.40-0.60]	Level of Satisfaction/ medium development	[0.80-1.0]	Level of Satisfaction/ very high development

Additionally, for questions related to social responsibility, the differences between the items' pretest and posttest means were calculated.

Application

In this study, the modified questionnaire was administered in three of the five courses that included service-learning during the spring semester of 2015 and in which faculty members volunteered to participate in the study. In this sense, the study employed a convenience sample (Creswell, 2012) since it included only the teachers and students who agreed to participate. The student pretest survey was a paper survey administered in the classroom at the beginning of the semester. Of the 137 students who were enrolled in the three courses, 80 students completed the pretest survey. For the posttest survey administration, 103 students completed the survey via the online survey management platform (i.e., http://www.surveymonkey.com). The posttest was administered two weeks before the end of the four-month school semester.

Table 6. Population and Sample

	N	%
Sex		
Male	80	58%
Female	57	42%
Total	137	100%
Age		
Mean		23 years
Major		
Commercial Engineering	24	17.51%

Engineering in Information and Management Control	77	56.20%
Accounting	35	25.54%
Undecided	1	0.72%
Total	137	100.00%
Survey Administration		
Pre-test (initial administration)	80	58%
Post-test (final administration)	103	75%

Of the total number of students enrolled in the three courses, 58% were male and 42% were female; the average age was 23 years (as of the November 1, 2015); and 18% were majoring in commercial engineering, 56% in engineering in information and management control, and 26% in accounting.

Results

For the descriptive analyses, different outcomes were calculated for each survey administration. In the case of the pretest, the social responsibility outcomes corresponded to the expected competencies for social responsibility development. In relation to the posttest, the social responsibility outcomes referred to the respondents' perceptions regarding how effective their development was in the various competency areas. We must stress that these outcome areas corresponded to sub-competencies involving stakeholders and the interaction of social, economic, and environmental impacts in consideration of the students' proposals and work actions (FEN, 2015). In regards to the dimension of implementation of the methodology (service-learning), students' satisfaction with their course experience was calculated. Table 7 presents the results in relation to the social responsibility competencies developed in courses that implemented service-learning, comparing the results obtained in the pretest and posttest surveys. For normal distribution variables, the Levene test was performed. For variables that did not have a normal distribution, the Mann Whitney U test was performed.

Table 7. Findings from Pre-test and Post-test of Students' Perception of Social Responsibility Competence Development

Item	Social Responsibility		
	Pretest	Post test	Significance
Consult the community partner to gather information, concerns and feedback from the work conducted	83% (3.49)	76% (3.27)	0.156
Communicate regularly with community partner	77% (3.31)	63% (2.89)	0.000
Recognize the needs and interests of the community partner	85% (3.55)	78% (3.34)	0.048
Generate a proposal that suits the needs and interests of the community partner, considering their points of view	85% (3.56)	73% (3.18)	0.032

Recognize the particularities of the context of the community partners, identifying disadvantages and opportunities within the context	83% (3.50)	79% (3.36)	0.135
Develop a work plan/solution consistent with the community partners' context	86% (3.58)	75% (3.26)	0.018
Consider and integrate the possible social impacts of the different action alternatives at the time of initiating the project	81% (3.44)	67% (3.01)	0.000
Consider and to integrate the possible economic impacts of the different action alternatives at the time of initiating the project	81% (3.44)	73% (3.20)	0.169
Consider and integrate the possible environmental impacts of the different action alternatives at the initiation of the project	74% (3.23)	51% (2.54)	0.000
Social Responsibility Competence Overall Mean	82% (3.45)	71% (3.12)	

Note. Fuente: Elaboración Propia.

The overall mean outcome obtained for expected and actual development of social responsibility competence decreased from 3.45 (pretest) to 3.12 (posttest). This finding suggests that while students' expected competence development is 82%, the actual developmental level perceived by students is 71%. Within the domain of social responsibility competence development, the most important results showed that the level of development, with respect to recognizing the particularity of the context of community partners, was 79%, which was consistent with 75% of development regarding the solution delivered to the advice.

Table 8. Overall Satisfaction of Service-Learning Implementation (Posttest)

Implementation of Methodological Approach (Service-Learning)	**Post-test**
The activity's link with the environment [community partners] was of adequate duration to achieve the objectives proposed	68% (3.04)
The skills I obtained through service reflect my learnings from it	61% (2.84)
The type of service given to the community partner is relevant to fulfill the expected learning goals of the [academic] subject	55% (2.64)
The contents of the subject are relevant for the type of service given	59% (2.77)
The service I provided to the community partner is feasible to apply	47% (2.41)
The activity associated with community engagement is consistent with my level of previous knowledge	63% (2.90)
The type of service planned in the course responds to the needs of the participating community partners	67% (3.00)

The learning from the course was significant for me	70% (3.10)
The quality of the relationship between my work team and the community partner promoted the fulfillment of the establised objectives	62% (2.85)
I would like to use this methodology again in different subjects	65% (2.94)
I would like to work in jobs similar to those of the community engagement activity developed in this course	71% (3.14)
I believe that the community partner will take into account the recommendations of my working group	69% (3.08)
After this activity I feel more professionally trained	64% (2.92)
Implementation of the Methodology Overall Mean	63% (2.89)

Note. Fuente: Elaboración propia

With regard to the implementation of the service-learning methodology, a posttest mean of 2.89 was observed. This was interpreted as a 63% level of satisfaction with the service-learning methodological approach. Favorable points highlighted in the posttest survey included the ability to perform work similar to careers (71%), meaningful learning from the course (70%), and the community partner's consideration of the recommendations offered by the students' working group (69%).

Conclusions

The objective of developing generic skills in students has raised the challenge in recent years to incorporate active learning methodologies that provide students with opportunities for meaningful learning that go beyond what is possible through traditional learning approaches. The service-learning methodological approach meets the necessary standards for promoting the development of students' skills, such as social responsibility (Fernández et al., 2006; Puig et al, 2011). On the one hand, service-learning provides an opportunity to respond to specific needs of the community, allowing the institution (i.e., the university) to link with its environment in a positive way and generating benefits for both parties. On the other hand, students have an approach that engages them in authentic experiences in the fields of economics and business, giving them the opportunity to experience the responsible exercise of their profession, while both considering the needs of community stakeholders and incorporating economic, social, and environmental impacts (Brower , 2011). In this way, students gain a comprehensive education in the framework of sustainable human development capable of meeting the challenges of the country.

Based on the results presented here, it can be concluded that the decline in development outcomes for competitive social responsibility at a general level indicates that the performance expectations that students had at the beginning of the course were not met at the end of the course. This may be due to several factors. For one, students may have underestimated perceptions about the complexity of the required performance and therefore underestimated the difficulty of the tasks of achieving the expected performance levels. This then affected their perception of their final performance level at the completion of the course and, ultimately, their perception of their performance in each of the social responsibility sub-competencies. In this regard, the decrease in the percentage of self-reported final performance versus expectations of student performance at the start of the semester was not necessarily negative but, rather, reflected a "reality check" among students regarding the contributions and work needed to achieve the expected goals as a result of service-learning's engagement of students in articulating theory with practice. The link with real authentic challenges is an essential feature of implementing the service-learning methodological approach (Puig, et al., 2011; Tapia, 2010); it helps to regulate the expectations of student performance and identify opportunities for improvement of social responsibility competencies.

Despite this, it should be noted that performance expectations for two of the nine elements of social responsibility were met: "Consult the community partner to gather information, concerns and feedback from the work conducted" and "Consider and integrate the possible economic impacts of the different action alternatives at the time of initiating the project." Despite a decrease in pre-post outcomes on both of these items, the difference was not statistically significant. While students did meet their expectations for these items, however, the same was not true for their performance regarding their interactions with community partners or with those who consider social or environmental impacts. For this, there may be multiple explanations. On the one hand, it may be that less importance was attributed to students' performances involving the partner and/or incorporating different economic impacts, and therefore efforts aimed at fulfilling these were lower. It could also be due to the benefit of hindsight regarding one's initial limitations after generating a product, in line with Bloom's (1977) taxonomy of higher-level thinking processes. In the context of the Department of Business and Economics, the economic impacts and outcomes were more developed than the social and environmental outcomes. In any case, these results suggest a need to continue developing the social responsibility of students in FEN. It is important for future professionals to be able to make decisions that more fully consider the interests of stakeholders, in alignment with the context in which the community stakeholders are situated.

Additionally, it is imperative to continue promoting new instructional approaches institutionally, linking academia with the external environment and promoting the development of social responsibility competencies. In this regard, the future challenge in relation to strategic institutional efforts is to find ways to strengthen service-learning and to look into other instructional strategies that promote similar social responsibility purposes. As for students' development training for social responsibility, it is necessary to strengthen relationships through the engagement of stakeholders with social and environmental issues. In terms of assessing the performance of students, continuous review and improvement of the instruments used is necessary in order to deliver more and better tools for managing support units and curricular teaching teams.

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