

Service-Learning and SDG 17: A Qualitative Analysis of Community Partnerships at DLSU Laguna

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning is a teaching method that requires linking community service to academic application to create a procedural way through which students relate the theoretical aspects of learning in the classroom with actual applications and to meet the identified specific needs of the local communities while Sustainable Development Goals 17 (SDG 17) emphasizes partnerships for the cooperation of people and organizations to mobilize resources, knowledge, skills, and resources to advance sustainable development goals. Both programs have a common goal: to develop sustainable development for the community. This qualitative research utilized thematic and content analysis together with qualitative document analysis (QDA) to assess the role of the Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna (DLSU Laguna) in promoting sustainable communities. Documents that were examined include syllabi of courses and guidelines of the program, descriptions of the projects, partnership agreements, journals of the students, and evaluation forms of the community partners. These documents provided an overall picture of the SHSSLP on how it approached engaging with the communities, the collaborative experiences of stakeholders, and the program's alignment with SDG 17 principles, which entails strengthening partnerships for implementation, innovative technological support, and resource mobilization. The progress reports and post-implementation evaluations provided additional information on achieving the program's outcomes and assessing its effectiveness after the implementation. The results and findings show that the DLSU Laguna's SHSSLP helps in enabling effective community engagement, sharing knowledge and mutual learning, promoting effective resolution of organizational and community challenges, promoting capacity building and resilience in communities, and supporting the achievement of SDG 17, with its implications that the community partners describe the organization as an indispensable foundation for fostering service-learning with the DLSU Laguna SHSSLP. Through service-learning as a component of the academic program, the community partners could access institutional resources while the students and faculty learned from local perspectives. This qualitative document analysis of the SHSSLP at DLSU Laguna provides valuable insights into the university's efforts to foster sustainable community partnerships aligned with SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals.

Keywords: Service-Learning; Sustainable Development Goal 17; Community Engagement; Sustainable Partnerships; Qualitative Document Analysis

INTRODUCTION

“Learning by doing” is John Dewey’s philosophy, where the student learns best. It emphasizes student engagement and the practical application of concepts like service learning. It is a teaching method that requires linking community service to academic application to create a procedural way through which students relate the theoretical aspects of learning in the classroom with actual applications and to meet the identified specific needs of the local communities (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Reflecting on service learning for the UN's priorities of SDGs, Paul et al. (2023) call for SDG 17, which is aimed at promoting partnerships for achieving all goals collectively to develop and share environmentally friendly technologies. They also note that SDG 17 emphasizes partnerships for the cooperation of people and organizations to mobilize resources, knowledge, skills, and resources to advance sustainable development goals.

The Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna Campus holds a promising potential for community service and sustainable development due to its emphasis on developing the partnership beyond the transaction service mode. It's a pedagogy that enables students to interact with communities while they engage in active and real-life learning experiences. It is also a part of DLSU's vision-mission, which states it is "a leading learner-centered research university, bridging faith and scholarship in the service of society, especially the poor and marginalized."

This study adopted the qualitative document analysis approach to capture the program's impact and opportunities, to appreciate better collaborative partnerships, knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and co-development of sustainable programs tailored to the local community needs. In the current research, specific program documentation, feedback from the community partners, and students' reflections reveal the depth of the SHSLP's involvement with the local communities. This approach not only gives a broader view of the program, the patterns of activity, and overall results but also offers perceptions of students and the community concerning the program and their experiences in the initiative.

The research has filled a gap in the existing literature in identifying the experience and the effects of the community partners that engage in service-learning activities. This gap is important, particularly because previous research has focused mainly on the student's learning accomplishments and excluded the crucial contributions made by the community partners. Programs based on the theory of active learning integrated with the theory of service learning show the potential for producing a remarkable impact on society and the education system. This research will establish how these initiatives help realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG17), which focuses on partnership for the goals.

According to Chupp and Joseph (2010), service learning in secondary education dramatically contributes to building active citizenship and pursuing sustainable development goals. Such programs enhance students' participation in relevant socio-community projects, instilling in them the values and practices of partnership, involving others in society's developmental projects – and the improvement of society in general. When solving community projects, students learn practical aspects of various community problems, acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and become responsible members of society.

Drawing from experiences in the Philippines and the growing awareness of service-learning as an instructional strategy, service-learning is seen as having the capacity to foster and build mutually beneficial partnerships between the community and colleges/universities. Such partnerships are based on a shared vision of mutual collaboration, equal participation, and the focus on purposeful change ventures that meet the common goal of the communities.

Thus, the observed constant increase of the interest in service learning within the Philippine education system suggests its capabilities to foster the development of long-term community-university partnerships. These collaborations stress cooperation, equity, and mutual obligations to support community-driven projects and improve sustainability development goals and students' active engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Service-learning and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 help students understand how to strengthen and develop the means of implementation for sustainable development. This study used a qualitative document analysis (QDA) to assess the role of the Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna (DLSU Laguna) in promoting sustainable communities.

Content and thematic analysis were also utilized to examine syllabi of courses and guidelines of the program, descriptions of the projects, partnership agreements, journals of the students, and evaluation forms of the community partners to answer the following research questions:

1. How do documents of SHSSLP's activities show compliance with the purpose of SDG 17, the goal that focuses on partnerships?

2. What themes come out in the SHSSLP program documentation regarding the nature and outcomes of these partnerships?
3. In what ways does the partnership agreement encapsulate DLSU Laguna's commitment to sustainable development in times of community engagement?

These documents provided an overall picture of the SHSSLP on how it approached engaging with the communities, the collaborative experiences of stakeholders, and the program's alignment with SDG 17 principles, which entails strengthening partnerships for implementation, innovative technological support, and resource mobilization. The progress reports and post-implementation evaluations provided additional information on achieving the program's outcomes and assessing its effectiveness after the implementation.

A systematic coding framework guided the analysis and was based on the following categories: sustainable partnerships, knowledge exchange, co-creation of community-based projects, and alignment with SDG 17. The coding logic of emergent patterns and narratives was cross-checked across the data sources and time points, strengthening the credibility of the findings and including the stakeholders' multiple viewpoints.

The observations derived from the analysis were integrated to understand which of the SHSLP's efforts support the creation of effective community partnerships for long-term engagement. In particular, the knowledge-acquisition potential, the establishment of partnerships and mutual work-related cooperation, and the adoption of common projects relevant to the needs of the target communities were also stressed. The research issues also responded to concerns and issues in partnership development, which provided action-oriented solutions to enhance the capacity for sustainability of university-community partnerships.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Through the qualitative document analysis, the following themes and issues related to the effect of the Senior High School Service Learning Program at DLSU Laguna on the establishment of sustainable partnerships with the community were identified. The findings are presented under the following thematic areas: enabling effective community engagement, sharing knowledge and mutual learning, promoting effective resolution of organizational and community challenges, promoting capacity building and resilience in communities, and supporting the achievement of SDG 17.

1. Enabling Effective Community Engagement

Community Engagement of the Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna (DLSU Laguna) is one of the processes working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by community with special interest to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices. This systematic approach broadens the scope, shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, with the implications for inclusiveness to ensure consideration is made of the diversity within any community. A joint effort towards the planning process and recognition of the other party with mutual collaboration was emphasized through partnership contracts, where activity organization and delivery incorporated the university inputs and partners' context-related knowledge. By aligning with the AU goals, local needs were complimented in a way that enriched student learning (Abenir, 2022).

Training needs related to community responsiveness of skills, trust building, and partnership sustainability are also required. As demonstrated by community partners, the university was willing to engage their concerns. In response to a question, one of the partners reflected, "The program values our input and ensures that the projects meet our actual needs, not preconceived assumptions."

Documents in the form of student reflection journals also depicted a developed understanding of the importance of culturing trust-based relationships with stakeholders. One student remarked: "Meaningful change happens

through genuine collaboration, where we listen to local leaders and learn alongside them, rather than imposing solutions.”

Qualitative data from documents and testimonies showed that grantee cooperation reflected in trust building was conducive to the sustainability of the partnerships. DLSU Laguna enacted feasible sociopolitical partnerships that are innovative enough to address new challenges as she put the community in focus. As noted in prior studies, B2B customers progressively channeled to MNP through media influences (Goff et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2006).

2. Sharing Knowledge and Reciprocal Learning

This service-learning program of Senior High School (SHSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna (DLSU Laguna) helps students to share knowledge and learn through collaboration with community partners where reciprocity has always been attached to service-learning, and it is often noted that service-learning is “premised on reciprocal learning” as these students have done in this program. They were able to practice what was being learned inside the classroom, introduce new concepts and tools to the people, and put them into reality. Through these mutual learning processes, people in the community learn from them and vice versa. Reflection on what has transpired in the community and developing critical thinking skills among them is necessary, as one student shared, “Therefore, I discovered the power of cooperating with the community in a way that enriched our knowledge, values, and different perspectives on problem-solving.”

3. Promoting Effective Resolution of Organizational and Community Challenges

Service-learning provides students with opportunities to develop civic engagement skills. By working with community members, students can enhance their group, organizational, and interpersonal skills. They also can gain important experience working with diverse members of their communities. The collaborative design of De La Salle University Laguna's Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSLP) (DLSU Laguna) ensured that initiatives were context-responsive and community-driven.

Program documentation and community partner agreements demonstrated intentional efforts to jointly identify local needs and priorities (Hollingsworth, 2019). Student reflection journals and partner feedback highlighted the impact and co-created projects addressing pressing social and environmental issues, including food security, education access, and environmental sustainability. One community partner stated: “The service learning projects enabled us to address issues in ways we would not have managed alone, combining our strengths with the university’s resources.” In this manner, University-Community linkages strengthen. The service-learning program also ensured the role of DLSU Laguna as a relevant partner for sustainable development by aligning academic knowledge with the needs of the communities. From this perspective, the approach also improved stakeholder relations and created the basis for multi-stakeholder cooperation.

4. Promoting Capacity Building and Resilience in Communities

Social skills of society and civic accountability are defined as the energetic involvement of an individual in a community (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2004). Buss (2004) reiterates that decent character and excellent social skills should be the primary concern of every educational system. We should produce ethical human beings before our students become skilled professionals. Therefore, nurturing social skills, building personality, and learning ethical, moral, and social values are considered the primary purposes of the teaching and learning process and are also stressed by many educationists like Dewey. The Senior High School Service Learning Program (SHSLP) of De Lasalle promotes community resilience and capacity building by creating a sense of belonging, improving social skills, and increasing a sense of responsibility among their students. They were able to adapt to climate change and develop sustainability in disaster risk reduction. The program demonstrated a strong commitment to building community partners' institutional capacity and resilience through reciprocal capacity-building collaborations. These activities gave the community organizations the resources to address these issues, building their capacity to face the next crisis (Abenir, 2022).

5. Supporting the Achievement of SDG 17

The service-learning program of Senior High School (SHSLP) of De La Salle University Laguna (DLSU Laguna) is one such opportunity to harness the power of education, which can contribute to achieving SDGs by raising awareness, promoting understanding, and mobilizing action toward sustainable development. In this regard, education serves both as a goal and a means of fulfilling other aspects of sustainable development, not only focusing on learning content and outcomes but emphasizing the importance of pedagogy and the overall learning environment to provide a holistic and transformative educational experience with the community partnership. Self-evaluation and community-engaged planning in the service learning program created culturally responsive and equitable institutions (SDG 17.16) of initiatives that are supportive of or responsive to community activation or capacities for sustainable improvement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The service-learning program of DLSU Laguna provides a practical, collaborative, and reflective environment in which students develop and apply the competencies essential for addressing sustainable development issues. It immerses students in real-world contexts where they can apply theoretical knowledge to practice, thus fostering key competencies in a meaningful and impactful way. By addressing real community needs through service-learning, students develop a sense of responsibility and commitment to sustainable development by addressing real community needs through service-learning.

The program helps deepen their understanding of course content, appreciate their discipline more broadly, and enhance their personal values and civic responsibility that shed light on the vital role to play in fostering sustainable community partnerships and advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 17.

The community partners describe the organization as an indispensable foundation for fostering service-learning with the DLSU Laguna SHSLP. Through service learning as a component of the academic program, the relationship between universities and communities is enhanced and characterized by cooperation, trust, and teamwork. This approach practices participatory development, especially the significant involvement of the community members in the decision-making process, with the local people understanding the challenges, the generation of solutions, and the giving of knowledge in return (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). A critical aspect of these partnerships is their emphasis on reciprocity and sustainability. Such results are consistent with Abenir's (2022) statement that regular cooperation and co-ownership help to establish trust-based interactions. The community partners could also access institutional resources while the students and faculty learned from the local perspectives. This approach made a project considerate of the context in which it was being implemented. It ensured the projects enhanced and solved problems such as lack of regard for education, hunger, and environmental degradation. Such efforts clearly show the possibilities of multi-stakeholder collaboration in pursuing the SDGs (Peterson et al., 2006).

From the experience of operating the program in DLSU Laguna, it cannot be denied that it can bring success to the HEIs due to creating the program and implementing service learning in the academic curriculum. HEIs can complement curriculum learning and the broader positive change initiatives by creating purposeful community engagement structures. This way, the local people will own the projects and thus nurture sustainable community partnerships with the end users. Furthermore, service-learning programs provide students with leadership, problem-solving, and cultural competencies, which prepare students for challenges facing society in general and the global world in particular.

From a community development lens, it is drawn that university-community partnerships suggest how collaborations work on local issues in the era of problem-solving. Institutional support and participation make it possible to achieve great endeavors, while participatory development involves the stakeholders in developing the needed programs. Effectively, enduring partnerships serve as long-term relationships, whether with states or civil society, reducing reliance on short-term calendars.

Future research could build on these findings by exploring the long-term impacts of service-learning programs on students and community partners and assessing the sustainability of partnerships and co-created solutions. Further explorations of the scalability and replicability of the DLSU Laguna model may also assist other institutions intending to implement similar approaches. However, it is also noted that numerical components, the analysis of the difficulties, and new approaches to service-learning improvement can also benefit the program.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this qualitative document analysis demonstrate the program's capacity to facilitate equitable, knowledge-sharing relationships between the university and local community stakeholders, ultimately contributing to co-creating impactful, sustainable development initiatives (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014) (Choudhary & Jesiek, 2016) (Hollingsworth, 2019) (Abenir, 2022). The service-learning program of the Senior High School of DLSU Laguna provides valuable insights into the university's efforts to foster sustainable community partnerships aligned with SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals. As higher education institutions continue to play a vital role in driving progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the DLSU Laguna service-learning program offers a promising model for other universities seeking to strengthen their community engagement and collaborative problem-solving efforts. The service-learning program of DLSU Laguna bridges the gap between classroom learning and community engagement, providing students with invaluable experiences that prepare them to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. By fostering systems thinking, anticipatory, normative, strategic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies, service-learning empowers students to address community issues, create impactful initiatives, and promote personal and social transformation. These competencies are essential in effectively attending to sustainable development issues to bring about meaningful change in society. As such, the service-learning of DLSU Laguna is a powerful pedagogical approach that aligns education with the aspirations of the SDGs by cultivating a generation of informed, skilled, and committed individuals ready to lead the way toward a sustainable future.

Nevertheless, as the study is presented to the program evaluation based on the document analysis, it is necessary to note that the study is limited solely to the analysis of the program documentation and does not address other factors that might be necessary in evaluating the program. Hence, subsequent collection of data can propose quantitative and qualitative surveys of students, faculty, staff, and community partners, as well as focus group discussions concerning their observations and experiences so that a better understanding of how the program has effectively achieved its goals, addressed issues and challenges, and possible way for its improvements. However, the findings of this study hope to assist in refining and establishing stronger service-learning programs in other institutions so they can actively achieve sustainable development goals through meaningful engagement with the communities.

The qualitative document analysis of the senior high school service learning program at DLSU Laguna has revealed the program's significant contributions to strengthening sustainable community partnerships in alignment with SDG 17. They also demonstrate how service learning projects in colleges and universities effectively shape communities' improvement and enhance their connection with communities. The findings of this study inform the development and enhancement of service learning initiatives for other educational institutions to help them increase their effectiveness as agents of change towards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as executed through quality community involvement.

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