

3_INSTITUTIONALISATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSIVE MODELS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

1_Short Papers

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SERVICE-LEARNING: ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT TOOLS

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Context and problem statement

In the current conditions of war and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine, the role of higher education institutions as active participants in societal transformation is growing. One of the effective tools for combining the educational, civic, and social missions of a university is service-learning, which integrates students' academic knowledge with practices for solving real-world community problems. This approach contributes to the formation of civic and democratic competencies, the development of responsibility, leadership, and the ability to collaborate.

At the same time, the active integration of service-learning into the educational process raises the issue of ensuring its quality. Unlike traditional forms of learning, which focus primarily on educational outcomes, service-learning aims to achieve a dual effect – educational and social, which significantly complicates the assessment process, as it requires consideration of the interests and outcomes for various stakeholders: students, teachers, the university, and local communities.

Among the key challenges, it is worth highlighting the lack of standardised approaches to assessing the quality of service-learning, the insufficient integration of such practices into internal quality assurance systems in higher education, and the limited availability of tools for measuring social impact [1]. Often, assessment boils down to recording students' participation in projects without a thorough analysis of the results achieved and the actual changes in communities. Furthermore, mechanisms for obtaining systematic feedback from LTC partners and incorporating their assessments into the quality assurance of the educational process remain underdeveloped.

In this regard, there is a need for theoretical reflection and practical justification of effective tools for assessing the quality of service-learning, which will allow for a complex consideration of both educational outcomes and social impact, and will also contribute to its institutionalisation as a standard practice in higher education institutions.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the study is an understanding of service-learning as an integrated educational practice that aims to achieve both learning outcomes and measurable social impact.

The study applies both qualitative and quantitative research methods (a mixed-methods approach), which ensures a comprehensive assessment. In particular, the following were applied: analysis of academic sources – to summarise theoretical approaches to ensuring the quality of service-learning and to identify key evaluation criteria; student surveys – to identify perceptions of the effectiveness of service-learning and the level of competence development.

Analysis

Service-learning is considered an educational approach that combines the academic preparation of higher education students with their active participation in addressing real-world social issues. Its essence lies in integrating educational objectives with the needs of the community on the basis of partnership, mutual benefit, and reflection. Key characteristics of service-learning include: a practical

focus of learning, an orientation towards achieving specific learning outcomes, the involvement of external stakeholders, and the mandatory inclusion of a reflective component that ensures the comprehension of the experience gained and its connection to theoretical knowledge.

Unlike traditional educational formats, where the transfer of knowledge within the classroom setting dominates, service-learning involves active interaction between students and the real social environment. While classical approaches focus primarily on individual academic achievement, service-learning integrates individual and collective outcomes, combining the educational component with social responsibility. Furthermore, traditional assessment methods are largely oriented towards testing knowledge and skills, whereas in service-learning, the assessment of the interaction process, the level of engagement, and the practical impact on the community are key.

The distinctive feature of service-learning lies in its multidimensional nature. Firstly, it is an educational outcome that encompasses the development of professional, social, and civic competencies, as well as the development of critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. Secondly, an important dimension is the social impact, which manifests itself in actual positive changes within the community, the resolution of local problems, the strengthening of social capital, and an increase in civic engagement. Thirdly, significant importance is given to the quality of partnership, characterised by the level of trust between the university and the community, mutual engagement, alignment of expectations, and the sustainability of cooperation [2].

Therefore, the quality of service-oriented learning cannot be reduced to educational indicators alone, but requires a comprehensive approach to assessment that takes into account the interconnection between academic achievements, social impact, and the effectiveness of the partnership.

Ensuring the quality of service-learning requires a systematic approach that combines internal mechanisms of education quality management with the specific nature of service-learning as a practice-oriented and socially directed activity. One of the key areas is the integration of such practices into the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. This

involves incorporating service-learning into educational programs, monitoring procedures, periodic reviews, and assessments of learning outcomes, as well as alignment with institutional quality policies.

An important approach is to focus on learning outcomes and the development of competencies. In this context, quality is determined not only by the knowledge acquired but above all by students' ability to apply it in real-life situations and to demonstrate civic responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills. Accordingly, assessment tools should be designed to evaluate the achievement of these specific outcomes, taking into account the specific nature of practical activities within communities.

A key component of quality assurance is the involvement of stakeholders – community representatives, employers, students, and lecturers – in the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning. This approach helps to increase the relevance of educational programs, ensures that the real needs of communities and the labour market are taken into account, and fosters a culture of partnership and shared responsibility for outcomes [3].

These approaches are implemented on the basis of a number of principles. The principle of partnership involves equal interaction between the university and the community as co-creators of the educational process. The principle of reflection ensures that students reflect on their experiences, which contributes to a deeper acquisition of knowledge and the development of competencies. The principle of mutual benefit emphasises achieving a balance between the university's educational goals and the needs of the community, which is a necessary condition for the sustainability of such practices.

Consequently, quality assurance in service-learning is based on the integration of institutional mechanisms, a focus on outcomes, the active involvement of stakeholders, and adherence to key principles of cooperation, which together ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of this approach.

The effectiveness of any quality assurance system cannot be assessed without direct feedback from its key stakeholders – the students. Since service-oriented learning is based on reflection and the subjective experience of engagement, analysing the

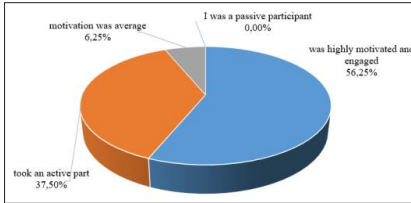
perception of this format by the students themselves becomes crucial for understanding the actual impact of the methodology on their professional and personal development [4]. For this purpose, a survey was conducted on the effectiveness of the implemented initiatives. In December 2025, a survey was conducted among higher education students at Sumy State University who were enrolled in the courses 'Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications' and 'Child Mental Health Support'. The object of the study was the experience of students involved in the implementation of community-oriented projects within the framework of these courses. The survey was based on a system of indicators covering the level of motivation, the quality of acquired professional competencies, and the effectiveness of interaction with communities. The results of the student survey are summarised in Fig. 1.

An analysis of the survey results indicates an exceptionally high level of inner motivation among higher education students, as the vast majority of respondents described their level of engagement as high or active. An important indicator of the success of the Service-Learning methodology is the complete absence of passive participants, which confirms the ability of this format to transform academic learning into an activity that is personally meaningful to the student.

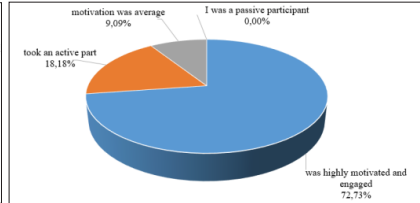
In terms of competence development, the survey results demonstrate significant progress in several areas. The most prominent improvement was in professional communication skills and the presentation of work results, noted by over half of the respondents. In addition to professional knowledge, participation in projects contributed to the development of analytical thinking, the search for creative solutions, and teamwork. Of particular importance is the values-based approach to learning, as a significant proportion of students highlighted an increase in empathy, social responsibility, and civic stance. This demonstrates the transformation of knowledge into a tool for genuine service to the community.

Assessing the effectiveness of the Service-Learning methodology in comparison with traditional teaching approaches, the vast majority of respondents recognised service-learning as more effective for the qualitative acquisition of material.

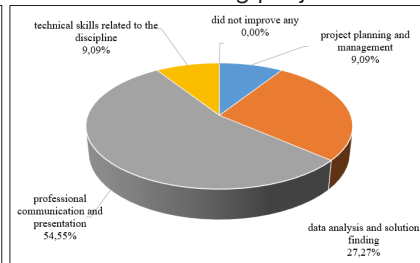
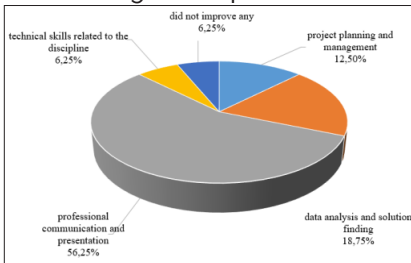
Students who studied the discipline “Child mental health support”



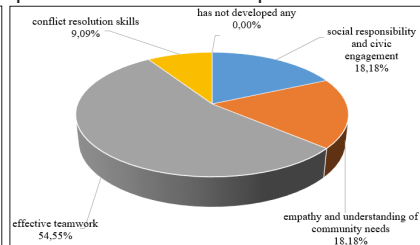
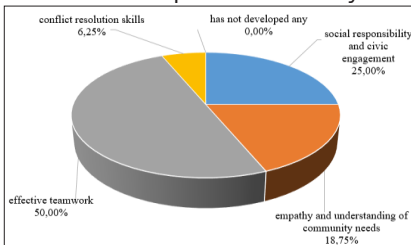
Students who studied the discipline “Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications”



How would you rate your level of involvement and motivation during the implementation of a Service-Learning project?

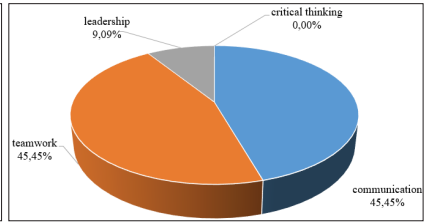
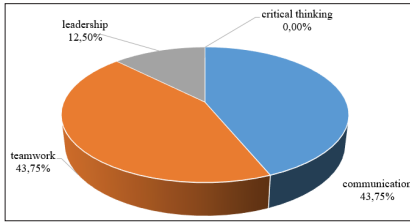


What competencies did you improve due to this experience?

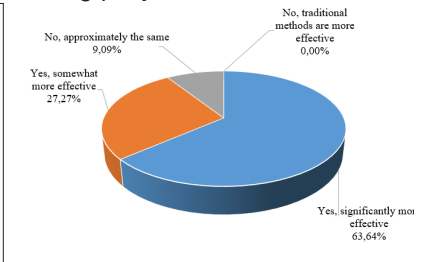
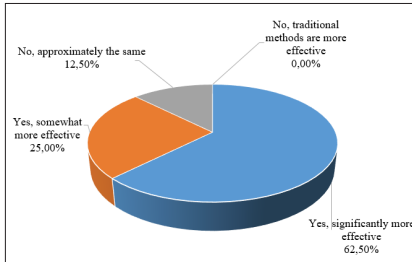


What social and civic competences did you develop during the implementation of the project?

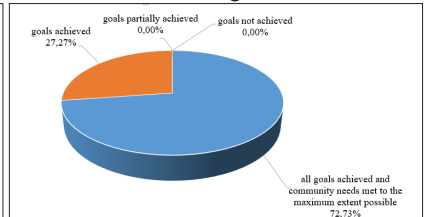
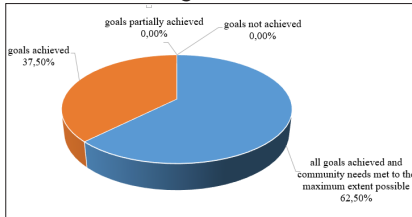
Fig. 1. Results of a survey of students regarding their experience of participating in a service-learning project



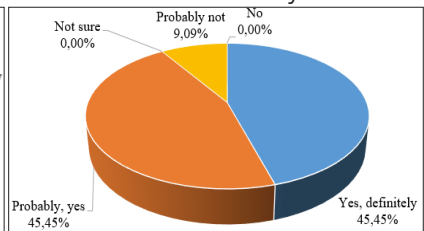
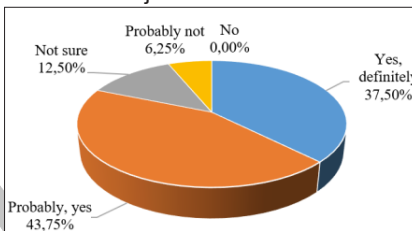
What skills did you develop while participating in the Service-Learning project?



Do you think that the Service-Learning format was more effective for learning the material than traditional teaching methods?



How successfully have you managed to achieve the project's objectives and meet the needs of the community?



Would you like to participate in projects of Service-Learning in the future?

Fig. 1 (continuance)

The full achievement of the set goals and the fulfilment of community needs confirm the high level of organisational preparation and practical significance of the initiatives. Despite isolated organisational difficulties and external challenges, the overall experience is assessed by participants as positive and motivating, expressed in their willingness to continue participating in similar projects in the future. Therefore, the analysis conducted demonstrates that integrating learning with social contribution is a powerful mechanism for developing well-rounded professionals capable of professional self-realisation and active participation in the processes of societal renewal.

During interviews, representatives of the Sumy local community confirmed the high relevance of service-learning as an effective tool for fostering cooperation between the university and the region, particularly in the context of war and post-war reconstruction. They noted that this model facilitates the practical integration of the educational process with the real needs of the community, encourages involvement of young people in addressing socially significant issues, particularly regarding support for child mental health and the development of entrepreneurial and digital skills, and also enhances the level of civic responsibility among higher education students.

It was also emphasised that service-learning creates the conditions for the formation of partnerships between the university, LTC, and non-governmental organisations, which is particularly important for consolidating efforts in the reconstruction of affected areas.

Thus, ensuring the quality of service-learning requires a systematic approach that integrates social practices into the academic environment. A key aspect is the use of combined assessment tools: from quantitative surveys to qualitative interviews with stakeholders. Research on the experience of Sumy State University proves that such a learning model not only enhances students' professional and soft skills but also has a tangible positive impact on the development of communities. In the context of martial law and Ukraine's future recovery, service-learning is becoming a strategic mechanism for strengthening partnerships between the academic community and civil society, shaping responsible professionals capable of addressing pressing social challenges.

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