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# Students' Perception of a Required Community Service in Kenya

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# Students' Perception of a Required Community Service in Kenya

Rispa A. Odongo, EdD

## Problem

The X University attempts to **foster in students a culture and habit of providing service to others** and initiated community service in 2004, which requires all students to complete 200 hours of service to community before graduation. The **effectiveness** of the program had **not been assessed** from **students' perspectives**.

## Purpose

The purpose of the study was to explore students' perceptions on how **the required community service influences** their **attitudes** towards being **philanthropic** and affecting positive social change.

## Significance

Universities in Kenya are expected to offer services to the communities by finding solutions to societal social, political, cultural and economic problems as part of university education (Ondigi, 2011), help address poverty levels reported at 49.8% in 2013 (KIPPRA, 2013). This study may:

- **Strengthen understanding** how community service influences students attitude to be philanthropic.
- Demonstrate that **community service is making a change** in students' lives.
- Lead to **improvement** of community service at X University for the benefit of students, university and partnering communities.

## Social Change Implications

The formative evaluation can be a **model** for evaluating community service in other universities.

Many X University students continue to be engaged in community service as part of giving back to society, and therefore the **communities** to which they provide service **will continue to benefit**.

Kenya government can **expand** community service to students at **all levels of education**, from primary school to university, for wider positive **social change**.

## Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework was the **experiential learning model** (Kolb & Kolb's, 2008), and its four aspects: concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization; and active experimentation.

## Relevant Scholarship

**Benefits** of community service to students include:

- Improved **critical thinking** skills (Castellan, 2012; Golberg & Coufal, 2009, Nelson & Crow, 2014).
- Instills **good citizenship**, community-building skills (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013).
- Helps **connect** community **experience** with **classroom theory** (Kajner et al., 2013).
- Increased awareness of the **realities of communities**, and finding solutions (Cambell, Dole, & Palombaro, 2011; Prohaska, 2013).
- Development of **tolerance and trust** for others, appreciate racial, cultural, and economic diversity (Johnson, 2013).
- Appreciation of **value of teamwork** in collaborations, and leadership (Plumber, et al., 2011).
- Receive **real life experiences** of responsibilities, frustrations, and rewards (Lardner, 2014; Leisey et al., 2012).
- Change in students **attitude is sustained** after service (Golberg & Coufal, 2009; Taylor and Raykov, 2014; Hatcher & Struder, 2015).

## Challenges

- Two paradigms exist, community service as **charity** or as **transformative** (Verges, 2010); should focus be on students or community (Stoeker, 2003)?
- Students tend to focus on **personal benefits**.
- It puts pressure on already **packed curriculum**.

## Research Questions

**RQ1:** What are **students' perceptions** of their involvement in identifying the community service program activities?

**RQ2:** How do students describe **their experiences** with community service program?

**RQ3:** How do students describe the influence of the community service program on their own philanthropy and affecting **positive social change**?

## Participants

**Purposive sampling** was used to identify 13 **4<sup>th</sup>- year** undergraduate **students** who had participated in the community service program during their 1<sup>st</sup>-year of study.

## Procedures

### Design

**Qualitative case study** was used to have a deeper understanding of how students perceive the required community service in influencing their attitude to be philanthropic by focusing on individuals' experiences.

### Data Collection

- **One-on-one** semi-structured **interview** protocol, containing interview questions based on the research questions.
- All interviews took about **1.5 hours** and were conducted in the same room, providing same environment.

## Analysis

I **transcribed** audio-recorded interview responses; labeled segments as codes to **build themes** answering the research questions; aligned them to the conceptual framework; reduced codes overlaps and redundancy; collapsed identified themes into fewer ones, and finally summarized them into **4 themes**.

## Findings

From the 4 themes that emerged showed that:

- University and external **support** were essential for successful community service by students, giving them first hand experience of neediness.
- Students developed positive **academic, social, and spiritual values** (linking theory to practice, humility, empathy, compassion, **philanthropy**, patience, respect for others cultures, improved intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships).
- Students recognized their own **self-worth** and fulfillment in giving back to society.
- Many students **continue** to participate in community **activities** after engagement by helping the needy.

## Interpretation

The required community service program **met its goals** by influencing and changing students' attitudes to be sensitive to people with needs, and instilling in them a sense of **philanthropy**.

The study **strengthened understanding** of community service at X University.

## Limitations

The study was limited to **X University** students who had reported positive impact of the community service.

The X University is a high selective university, students are mostly from upper economic spectrum; there is possibility that the **impact is more evident for privileged students**. The less privileged students from other universities in Kenya may not have similar experiences.

There is **no guarantee** that the change in students attitude to be philanthropic will be sustained through career lives (Goldberg & Coufal, 2009).

## Recommendations

- The X University need to assess the community service **sites** to ensure that they **meet the criteria of neediness** for better students' experience.
- Students be given **background information** on the moral values behind community service to minimize frustration during the initial weeks of engagement.
- Kenya Government should consider **extending** the required community service **to other levels** of education.
- **Further research is needed** to assess sustainability of philanthropic spirit to career life; assess student impression on community service before and after engagement.

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