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blm@taylors.edu.my
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ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN A REVERSE-MENTORING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINANCIAL LITERACY SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

Kelly Pei Leng Tee

Taylor's University, Malaysia
peileng.tee@taylors.edu.my

Vinitha Guptan

Taylor's University, Malaysia

Ratneswary Rasiah

Taylor's University, Malaysia

Abstract

The topic of how best to prepare graduates for employment has received both academic and practitioner attention over the years, with tertiary education providers often being criticised for not addressing what is termed the graduate skills gap, and not engendering learners with the appropriate employability skills required by employers. In light of the issue, this research will explore the role of tertiary education providers in developing graduate competencies and its capacity to better prepare them for the workplace, focusing on the role of service learning. Service learning (SL) is an important educational tool in enhancing graduate employability by developing students knowledge, skills, sensitivities, and commitments to ensure a successful transition to the workplace and to create useful citizens, more so in the post-pandemic era. This study addresses the design of a unique community service initiative project for business undergraduates and highlights the undergraduates experiences and skills gained through the project. The community service project utilized a unique concept of reverse-mentoring which was successful and effective in implementing the concept of service learning among the business undergraduates. The study is based on Schumpeter's entrepreneurial theory of innovation, Kolb's Experiential Theory of Learning and Dewey's educational theory of constructivism. The undergraduates learning experience was assessed through qualitative thematic analysis of their reflective portfolios. The tasks and assessments of the community service project provided students first-hand experience in serving the community and allowing them to gain various pertinent skills such as communication and leadership skills. Furthermore, it also taught the business students a valuable lifelong skill which is to create social values through their business activities: looking beyond profit margins and focusing on the value of contributing to the community. This study provides a snapshot of efforts towards teaching and learning and the crucial role played by tertiary education providers in service-learning, not only in equipping learners with a set of life skills, but also in nurturing positive attitudes towards the environment, their community and cultural diversity. Some insights for future research and practice is discussed.

Keywords: community engagement; experiential learning; financial literacy; reverse-mentoring; service-learning

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