



Service-Learning Might be the Key: Learning From the Challenges and Implementation Strategies in EFL Teacher Education in Oman

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Service-learning, a major reform in higher education, is considered essential for developing citizenship for the 21st century. This paper reports a study aimed at investigating the problems and challenges faced when implementing service-learning in pre-service education of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and carried out in the Sultanate of Oman. The study also investigated the strategies that could possibly be used to overcome the challenges. A two-part questionnaire was designed and administered to a sample of 65 respondents comprising EFL instructors, pre-service student-teachers, administrators and administrative support staff. The first part of the questionnaire included 26 items covering 5 dimensions of challenges and the second consisted of 14 dimensions that covered a total of 77 strategies for overcoming the challenges identified. In general, the challenges were perceived to present serious problems in implementing service-learning; there were no significant differences between respondent groups on account of gender. The study also found that the strategies suggested were perceived to be very helpful in overcoming the challenges with no significant differences between faculty and administrators.

Key Words: Implementing Service-Learning, Service-Learning Challenges, Strategies, EFL Teacher Education, Implementation Strategies, Service Learning in Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is currently undergoing dramatic and unprecedented transformation. The status quo is being challenged both from within and without. New economic, social and political realities are emerging and education is challenged to respond. Today, the validity of our curricula, our policies, methods and even principles are being questioned. As our nations struggle to find their place in the knowledge economy, we are confronted with issues of citizenship, governance and engagement that need to be addressed.

Different countries of the developing world are experiencing the same pressures and they have turned to educational reform and school improvement as the most viable option. For the developed world however, the quest for best educational practices leading to better teaching and learning has been a continuous endeavor of educators, theorists and researchers for a long time. This has led to paradigm shifts and new directions in the field of education over the years, beginning with the early 20th century progressive educator John Dewey's call for 'learning by doing' and the advent of the 'experiential learning' theory.

Service-learning is one of the fastest growing reforms in higher education and is considered to be essential in developing citizenship for the 21st Century. Over 550 presidents of higher education institutions across the United States of America have agreed to promote service-learning to develop students' citizenship skills and values in keeping with a mission to educate students for citizenship, encourage collaborative partnerships between campuses and communities, and assist faculty who seek to integrate service into their teaching and research (Campus Compact, 1999). There has been a growing interest in service-learning in American higher education (Kelshaw et al., 2009) and more than a third of all American universities and colleges offer courses in service-learning, some of them making participation in service-learning even mandatory (Student Horizons, Inc., 2008).

The early 20th century reforms established a new era of learning through concrete, direct and purposeful experiences, emphasizing the central role that experience plays in the learning process (Kolb, 2000). Citing his earlier work of 1984, Kolb (2000) referred to the intellectual origins of service learning as being "in the experiential works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, taking together Dewey's philosophical pragmatism, Lewin's social psychology, and Piaget's cognitive developmental genetic epistemology from a unique perspective on learning and development" (p.2). This experiential theory, in turn, led to a number of similar learning theories that advocate learning by doing and by engaging the learner in authentic activities and first-hand experiences. Among these theories are 'active learning' and 'service-learning'.

Much of the foundation of service-learning is derived from Dewey's (1916) educational and social philosophy which emphasized that the individual's active, reflective, purposeful and direct interaction with the environment results in the best form of learning that produces an engaged citizenry which is one of the most important requirements for effective participation in a democracy (Dewey, 1938; Giles and Eyster, 1994).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Definitions of Service-Learning

There seem to be as many definitions of service-learning as there are implementers and researchers of service-learning depending on the purpose, its use and implementation. Sigmon (1979) defined service-learning "as an experiential education approach that is premised on reciprocal learning." Today, however, 'service-learning' is being used to describe "a wide array of experiential education endeavours, from volunteer and community service projects to field studies and internship programs" and "service-

learning occurs when there is a balance between learning and service outcomes” (Furco, 1996, pp. 1-2). Another dimension of service-learning is the reciprocity of benefit between the service provider and the recipient (ibid.).

In order to understand the concept of service-learning, it is necessary to examine the two words in the term together – *service* and *learning*. Taken together, it is clear that service-learning blends service with learning in deliberate, meaningful ways. Service-learning is at once an educational philosophy, a pedagogical approach, a community development model, a mindset, and a curriculum design (Wade, 2007; Neal, 2003). Service implies volunteering, community action, citizenship, and so on, while learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills, questioning, reasoning, thinking, reflecting, and evaluating the information gathered.

Integrating community service with structured classroom learning thus enriching course content is the crux of service-learning. It is guided community service encompassing the application of skills and knowledge, critical reflection, decision making and problem solving capabilities and collaborative working skills, thereby increasing students' civic awareness and enhancing the quality of life of the entire community. Thus integrated, service-learning engages students in guided community service, application of skills and knowledge, and reflection appropriate to the course or program (LCC, 1997: 1).

Characteristics of Service-Learning

A service-learning model consists of three reciprocally influential components: *Knowledge* (a deep understanding of community issues); *Compassion* (an ethics of care); and *Action* (meaningful interactions between students, mentors, and community stakeholders). Advocates of different learning styles have often suggested that students will learn a great amount from the simple act of interacting with other students (Rhoads, 1998). Four stages of service-learning have been identified: Preparation (teachers and students work together to plan the service-learning experiences), Action (the plan is carried out), Reflection (learning and experiences are integrated with awareness and personal growth) and Demonstration (what is learned is evidenced) (Learn and Serve Clearinghouse, 2010).

The concept of service-learning essentially implies that it is conducted in and meets the needs of the community, that it is coordinated by a school in partnership with the community, it is integrated and enhances the academic curriculum and it provides structured time for students to reflect on the service experience and more importantly, it provides an opportunity for students to experience civic responsibility and engagement. (CNCS,2007; Billing,2000;Covitt,2002; Learn and Serve Clearinghouse,2010).

Benefits of Service-learning

The benefit of service learning is three-pronged: it benefits the student, the institution and the community at large. It creates a partnership between the college and the community. At the student level, the benefits are enormous, engaging them in active learning and revealing the relevance of academic work. It increases their awareness of the current social issues. In addition, it enhances their critical thinking and improves

interpersonal skills and civic responsibility and engagement. The faculty and institution benefit from service learning in that it enriches teaching and learning. It helps identify new areas of research and extends campus resources into the community. For the community, service learning fosters an ethic of service and builds symbiotic partnerships. It also provides human resources to meet the needs of local communities (LCC, 2002).

Perhaps the most important for higher education and teacher education in particular are the academic benefits which can be summarized as follows:

- **Pedagogy discrimination** between service-learning and traditional methods courses: The experience is more structured, more focused and productive, with much more hands-on experience and feedback.
- **Content comprehension and application** through service-learning projects: There is more opportunity to comprehend the content and apply the skills, put the theories taught and learnt in methods courses to practice, and to apply academic skills and knowledge to the needs of the schools; there is more accountability.
- **Civic engagement**, or the ability to influence individual and collective action to identify and address issues of public concern, and understand the relationship between the service-learning projects and their impact on social and cultural infrastructures, is a great way to give back to the community. (Daniels, Patterson and Dunston, 2010).

The pedagogical shift to service-learning is seen as improving teacher education programs by being a powerful learning experience for pre-service candidates, and impacting the quality of learning experiences for K-12 students. Service-learning is seen as leading to academic success, because it offers opportunities for gaining knowledge and acquiring vocational skills not available in schools (Johnson, Johnson-Pynn and Pynn, 2007). Service-learning experiences have been found to be effective in shifting beliefs and attitudes of pre-service candidates. They have been linked to several essential dispositions, including caring, sensitivity to student differences, democratic values, and commitment to teaching. (Al-Barwani, Van Nuland & Al-Mekhlafi, 2011).

Challenges Involved in Implementing Service-learning

Higher education institutions have a clear obligation to take account of society's needs, but many people feel that it is not necessary to require service-learning for students. This presents a challenge to faculty who are trying to convince their institutions to pursue service-learning as an option for students. A common belief is that not everyone is familiar with service-learning, and, therefore, it is neither possible nor desirable to require a campus full of students to be placed out into the 'world' and service it and call it a 'worthwhile learning experience'. Another common challenge that faculty face is the belief that the community should not be used as a laboratory (Lisman, 1998) and that people in the surrounding communities should not be made to feel that they are exploited or that they are a 'project' for the students.

Another challenge is whether or not ethics and social matters can really be taught in the classroom setting and whether doing so is the responsibility of the university. Many

propose that ethics should be taught outside of school and should, therefore, already be in place by the time a student arrives at college. Nevertheless, it is our duty to educate our students in all aspects including ethics (Lisman, 1998).

Making sure that the service-learning experience is related to the student's curriculum is a challenge as well. The goal of a college or university is to encourage and enhance student learning and, with the limited amount of time available, a correlation between the activity and outcome should be ensured (Rhoads, 1998). One of the greatest challenges that institutions face is, therefore, to decide on a measure that gives faculty, administrators, and students the chance to evaluate progress. One of the concerns faculty may have is that the developmental/learning curve is not the same for all students, and, hence, it becomes extremely difficult to evaluate whether or not a student really learned from the service experience.

The reasons commonly given by teacher educators to explain why they do not incorporate service-learning into their pre-service programs are:

1. Service-learning is experiential. Teachers learn it just by doing it; therefore, explicit preparation is unnecessary.
2. Preparation in the use of service-learning is not productive until after teachers have resolved many of the challenges faced by novice teachers; therefore, it is not useful in pre-service education programs.
3. There is no room in our program for anything else. If we added service-learning, what would we take out? (Erickson and Anderson, 1997)
4. The curriculum is already overcrowded. In pre-service methods-based courses, it is often difficult to integrate service-learning instruction, as there is a need to master diverse amounts of specific content and skills (Wolf and Laurier, 2002).
5. There are difficulties in arranging successful K-12 and community service-learning sites.
6. The need to link service-learning to state and national teacher education accreditation standards puts a lot of pressure (Anderson, 1998).
7. Pressure to succeed on national exams is a major concern, especially in China, and participation in service-learning activities conflicts with study time (Johnson, Johnson-Pynn and Pynn, 2007).

In summary, the major challenge is that not all faculty are familiar with service learning and this may affect its successful introduction. A basic challenge is how it can be integrated into the existing curriculum given the limited time available in college. Another issue is the lack of consensus on when and where ethics should be taught, as many people believe that students should be ethically equipped when they reach college. A correlation between activity and outcome is also a problem and one of the greatest challenges of service learning is the absence of evaluation techniques to measure its progress and success.

Suggestions (strategies) to overcome the challenges

The foregoing review has presented the importance of including service-learning in higher education programs in general and teacher education in particular in order to

promote positive attitudes towards society and to inculcate necessary skills, attitudes and dispositions and citizenship. It also discusses the challenges faced by those who are concerned with implementing service-learning. Literature also contains some recommendations from experienced service-learning teacher educators and service-learning experts for overcoming the challenges and successfully integrating service-learning into pre-service teacher education. Allam (1993), for instance, reported the recommendations of a group of teacher educators and state department of education officials from the state of Mississippi. In order to accomplish the infusion of service-learning in pre-service teacher education on a comprehensive scale, the following suggestions are provided:

- Linking student teaching placements with local schools receiving grants under the National and Community Service Act. These students should in turn work in teams with teachers and administrators trained in service-learning to restructure the learning environment.
- Designing a state-wide training model on the theory and practice of service-learning for teacher educators. Personal faculty involvement in the experiential learning process is the most significant avenue to leverage support and understanding for service-learning.
- Promoting collaboration among universities, school districts, and state education agencies to reform assessment, certification, and accreditation policies, regulations, and practices that are counterproductive to the improvement of teacher education and hence of teaching and learning.
- Infusing service-learning concepts and practices into the philosophy and culture of teacher education programs, not just as separate methods courses or practica.

Erickson and Anderson (1997) provide eight recommendations to assist teacher educators in overcoming the challenges involved with integrating service-learning into their teacher education curriculum:

1. Spend time with pre-service teachers helping them develop an understanding of essential elements of effective service-learning, especially the distinction between service-learning and community service.
2. The experiential component of service-learning is essential for pre-service teachers to gain the knowledge and skills needed to implement service-learning projects.
3. Seek out K-12 and community partners who receive support from sources such as the Corporation for National Service.
4. Integrate service-learning throughout a variety of courses in the teacher education program.
5. Work to create service-learning placements in K-12 schools that extend over a substantial period of time.

6. Service-learning field placements sites, whether in K-12 schools or other community agencies, do not need to be practicing ideal models of fully developed service-learning projects.
7. Prospective teachers need to be encouraged to “start small, but jump in” with regard to beginning new service-learning projects during student teaching or their first year of employment.
8. Support beginning teachers in their use of service-learning with resources and technical assistance.

The inclusion of service-learning is recommended as a vital instructional strategy in teacher education programs with these strategies suggested to facilitate the achievement of this goal:

- Provide teacher educators with training that connects service-learning to many of their other teaching strategies, such as project-based learning.
- Teacher educators and K-12 teachers must discuss service-learning as a teaching strategy and identify ways in which K-12 and teacher educators can support each other’s service-learning efforts.
- The approach to incorporating service-learning into teacher education must be strategically planned and institutionally driven. Great emphasis must be placed on working with education school deans and other university officials so that service-learning is understood well by everyone in the program.
- Service-learning must be incorporated in a comprehensive manner that includes, at a minimum, service-learning being taught as a teaching method, teacher educators using service-learning in their classes, and placing student teachers with K-12 teachers who use service-learning effectively.
- Methods courses must provide prospective teachers with direct instruction regarding the use of service-learning as a pedagogy, and provide them with opportunities to practice this pedagogy with the full support of those around them (California Department of Education, 1999).

Wade et al. (1999) conducted a multi-institution study to examine beginning teachers experiences with service-learning. Results indicate that 30% of the novice teachers in the study implemented service-learning as a teaching strategy during their first years in the classroom. Recommendations for teacher educators developed from the data collected include:

- Teacher educators should provide multiple service-learning experiences for pre-service teachers through classes, practica, and student teaching. These experiences should be positive ones and should include meaningful, enjoyable service and frequent opportunities for different types of reflection.
- Teacher educators should also encourage their students to implement service-learning in their future classrooms by having them brainstorm ideas for simple, low-cost projects and to plan appropriate reflection and assessment strategies.

- Pre-service teachers need to have considerable ownership for the service-learning projects they implement with K-12 teachers and students during practica and student teaching placements.
- Teacher educators should work with local school districts to help them develop comprehensive service-learning programs and to secure funds to hire service-learning coordinators and provide financial support for project costs.

Thus it becomes necessary to investigate research gaps addressing the challenges in relation to institutional, curricula, faculty, students and community issues. Moreover, a study of challenges alone would be incomplete without an exploration of possible strategies to overcome those challenges. The present study aims to address this gap. This study is built on a previous study conducted by EFL faculty at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (Al-Barwani, et al. 2010) It was a quasi experimental study that explored the impact of service learning on English language proficiency of pre-service EFL student teachers. The findings of the study revealed that student teachers who were involved in the service learning experience performed significantly better in all language skills tested. However, despite the obviously positive results, faculty members were hesitant to continue with the experiment. Thus, these researchers decided to explore the challenges that may impede the implementation of service learning in Teacher Education programs. Since service learning is a new approach in our country (and perhaps the region), and is not well understood by academics. Thus, a study that identifies the challenges and provides possible solutions and strategies might go a long way towards encouraging teacher educators to experiment on the service learning pedagogy.

More importantly, as the Middle East struggles to understand the powerful wave of change that is sweeping the region, educators are called upon to revisit policies, curricula and pedagogy so education can be more relevant to the new Middle East that is now emerging. Citizenship education has been cited as an important avenue that the region might choose to explore. This paper argues that service learning presents a potential solution for school reforms in the region.

METHOD

The Purpose of the Study

Given the importance attached to service learning in developing student engagement and citizenship education, this study aims at examining the implementation of service-learning in pre-service teacher education in Oman. More specifically, it investigates the specific challenges encountered and strategies proposed for successful implementation of service-learning in the Omani pre-service teacher education programs.

Study Questions

The present study attempted to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most common challenges that hinder implementation of service-learning in EFL pre-service education in Oman?

2. Are there any significant differences in the identification of challenges among Omani EFL pre-service instructors that are attributable to their gender and profession?
3. What are the strategies for overcoming the challenges that hinder implementation of service-learning in EFL pre-service education in Oman?
4. Are there any significant differences in the identification of strategies among Omani EFL pre-service instructors that are attributable to profession?

Sample

The sample consisted of EFL instructors and administrative staff at the pre-service teacher education program at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University. A sample of thirty-seven respondents answered the Challenges Questionnaire, whereas 28 responded to the Strategies Questionnaire, thus making a total of 65 respondents comprising EFL instructors, student teachers, administrators and administrative support staff (The Dean, Assistant Deans, Heads of departments, Coordinators of the service learning project, and support staff within the University as well as outside). The study sample comprised of 29 faculty and administrative staff at the College of Education, 11 supervisors, 8 school administrative staff and 22 student teachers.

Instruments

The work of Anderson and Pickeral (1999) formed the basis of the survey instrument used to identify “Challenges to Implementing Service-learning” and “Strategies for Successful Implementation of Service-learning”. The survey items consisted of two sections: the first included five dimensions of challenges (institutional issues, curricular issues, community issues, faculty issues, and student issues), having a total of 26 items. The second consisted of 14 dimensions that offered a total of 77 strategies to overcome each of the challenges identified. Participants were asked to rate the 26 items in the first section using a five-point Likert scale from ‘not a challenge’ (1) to ‘a critical challenge’ (5). The survey allowed for reporting of additional challenges that they may have experienced. In the second section, participants rated each of the 77 suggested strategies as ‘helpful’ (1) or ‘not helpful’ (2).

Both instruments were checked for face and content validity by the college faculty who had service learning experience. The validating process resulted in the addition of new items and the adaptation of some items to the study context.

Data Collection and Analysis

The surveys were distributed to faculty and administrative staff at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University and to the other sub-samples that were involved in the study. Both instruments were hand delivered and collected by the researchers.

Descriptive statistics were generated. Within each dimension of challenges, the issues were ranked from ‘a critical challenge’ (5) to ‘not a challenge at all’ (1). As for the Strategies section of the instrument, data was analyzed on the basis of the response scale: 1 = ‘helpful’ and 2 = ‘not helpful’. The responses to both sections were rank

ordered according to dimensions and issues for the challenges section of the questionnaire. The strategies section was rank ordered within each challenge.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The study revealed an overall high total mean of 3.30 indicating that the challenges were perceived to be serious obstacles to the implementation of service learning.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Dimensions

<i>Challenges – Issues</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
I. Institutional Issues	3.4381	.99320
IV. Faculty Issues	3.4321	.98441
II. Curricular Issues	3.3957	.87980
V. Student Issues	3.1857	.97742
III. Community Issues	3.1357	.85570
Total	3.3069	.61722

Table 1 shows that all groups of respondents involved in the pre-service teacher education program in Oman (faculty, administrative staff, supervisors and student teachers) revealed relatively serious concerns about the various issues that may hamper the implementation of service-learning in Omani pre-service teacher education. However, the degree of seriousness of the challenges varied among the identified dimensions. Institutional issues (mean 3.44), faculty issues (mean 3.43) and curricular issues (3.40) seem to constitute greater challenges to the implementation of service-learning in the pre-service program than the issues related to students (mean 3.19) and the community (mean 3.14). Specific challenges within each category of issues are shown in Table 2 and discussed below.

Table 2: Means and SD of dimensions

<i>Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
I Institutional Issues	3.4381	.99320
1. lack of funds	3.3143	1.35714
2. legal and safety concerns	2.9286	1.30018
3. lack of administrative support	3.8571	1.65262
4. lack of alignment with institutional faculty roles and rewards	3.4857	1.16399
5. lack of alignment of service-learning with institutional and/or department priorities	3.4857	1.16399
II Curricular Issues	3.3957	.87980
6. lack of sustained professional development	3.5571	1.09856
7. lack of time for service learning in pre-service curriculum	3.6143	1.42740
8. lack of time to plan service learning activities	3.1571	1.35813
9. lack of service-learning curriculum	3.9130	1.17247
10. difficulty in aligning service-learning with national teacher education standards	3.3571	1.17997
11. difficulty of linking service-learning with other education reform initiatives (e.g., CCCM; Integrated curriculum)	2.9571	1.27899
III Community Issues	3.1357	.85570
12. transportation difficulties	2.8143	1.45754
13. difficulty in communicating with public school teachers	2.9429	1.33932

14.	difficulty in communicating with community agency staff	2.9571	1.30146
15.	difficulty in communicating with site supervisors	3.0286	1.30741
16.	lack of appropriate service-learning sites for public school students	3.5286	1.28222
17.	difficulty locating 1-12 teachers interested in learning about service learning	3.2429	1.17258
18.	lack of service projects appropriate for 1-12 and teacher education students	3.2714	1.30685
19	Lack of community awareness with service learning	3.3000	1.34434
IV	Faculty Issues	3.4321	.98441
20.	faculty lack time necessary to plan and implement service-learning	3.5286	1.32667
21.	faculty unprepared to develop necessary long-term partnership	3.5571	1.28126
22	faculty unprepared to use service-learning as a teaching method	3.6000	1.30106
23	Some faculty not interested in service-learning	3.0429	1.47870
V	Student Issues	3.1857	.97742
24	lack of time to implement service learning related activities and requirements	3.4429	1.35813
25	lack of motivation to sustain interest in service learning	3.2143	1.23819
26	inability to cope with the sites' rules and regulations	2.9000	1.38470
	Total	3.3069	.61722

Table 2 clearly shows that with respect to 'institutional issues', lack of administrative support was identified to be the greatest challenge (mean 3.86), closely followed by lack of alignment with institutional faculty roles and rewards as well as with institutional and departmental priorities as posing equal challenge (mean 3.49); legal and safety concerns posing the least challenge (2.93).

Among 'curricular issues', lack of a service-learning curriculum was perceived to be the greatest challenge (mean 3.91), while the difficulty of linking service-learning with other educational reform initiatives such as CCCM was considered to pose the least challenge (mean 2.96).

With regard to 'community issues', lack of appropriate service-learning sites for students from public schools appeared to be the greatest challenge (mean 3.53), whereas transportation difficulties seemed to pose the least challenge (mean 2.81).

Among the 'faculty issues', lack of faculty preparedness to use service-learning as a teaching method was considered to be the greatest challenge (mean 3.60), with lack of faculty preparedness to establish long-term partnerships and lack of sufficient time to plan and implement service-learning (mean 3.56 and 3.53 respectively) being of a slightly lower level of challenge.

With respect to 'students' issues', lack of sufficient time to implement service-learning related activities and requirements posed the greatest challenge (mean 3.44), while students' inability to cope with the rules and regulations of the service-learning sites was the least of the challenges (mean 2.90).

One way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the subgroups according to their professions.

Table 3: Differences in the rating of seriousness of the challenges according to Profession

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
I. Institutional Issues	Faculty	3.2356	.82197	29	1.029	.386
	Admn. Staff	3.5833	.75066	8		
	Supervisors	3.3333	.99443	11		
	S-Ts	3.7045	1.23970	22		
	Total	3.4381	.99320	70		
II. Curricular Issues	Faculty	3.3448	.90853	29	.795	.501
	Admn. Staff	3.8250	.86479	8		
	Supervisors	3.2273	1.03353	11		
	S-Ts	3.3909	.77208	22		
	Total	3.3957	.87980	70		
III. Community Issues	Faculty	3.0647	.92438	29	.699	.556
	Admn. Staff	3.5469	.62299	8		
	Supervisors	3.1250	1.02011	11		
	S-Ts	3.0852	.75335	22		
	Total	3.1357	.85570	70		
IV. Faculty Issues	Faculty	3.3448	1.02516	29	.274	.844
	Admn. Staff	3.6250	1.08562	8		
	Supervisors	3.5909	1.07977	11		
	S-Ts	3.3977	.89196	22		
	Total	3.4321	.98441	70		
V. Student Issues	Faculty	3.0805	1.01831	29	.795	.500
	Admn. Staff	3.6250	.84398	8		
	Supervisors	3.3333	.93095	11		
	S-Ts	3.0909	.99832	22		
	Total	3.1857	.97742	70		
Total	Faculty	3.2029	.62407	29	1.037	.388
	Admn. Staff	3.6298	.53608	8		
	Supervisors	3.2888	.78925	11		
	S-Ts	3.3357	.53323	22		
	Total	3.3069	.61722	70		

Table 3 shows no significant differences exist between the four groups (faculty, administrative staff, supervisors and pre-service teachers). It also shows that, overall, administrative staff (mean 3.63) perceive more challenges in implementing service-

learning in pre-service education programs than the other three groups. Independent samples T-test was used to determine whether significant differences existed when the data was analyzed according to gender.

Table 4: Differences among EFL Pre-service Teachers in terms of Gender: Independent Samples T-Test

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
I. Institutional Issues	Male	29	66	3.3292	.79343	-.790	.100	.753
	Female	39		3.4837	.80116	-.791		
II. Curricular Issues	Male	29	66	3.1379	.93443	-.092	1.191	.279
	Female	39		3.1571	.78468	-.089		
III. Community Issues	Male	29	66	3.2414	1.00774	-1.136	.327	.570
	Female	39		3.5128	.94929	-1.126		
IV. Faculty Issues	Male	29	66	3.1034	.94744	-.319	.452	.504
	Female	39		3.1795	.98778	-.321		
V. Student Issues	Male	29	66					
	Female	39						
Total	Male	29	66	3.2308	.65401	-.801	.929	.339
	Female	39		3.3527	.59451			

Table (Table 4) above shows no significant differences due to gender over the various challenges. However, the female sub-sample showed a slightly higher mean (3.35) compared to that of males (3.23).

To address question three of the study which deals the strategies that would be useful to overcome the challenges, the researchers used descriptive statistics the results of which are presented on Table 5.

Table 5: Categories of Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges

	<i>Strategies for these Challenges</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
A	Faculty lack time necessary to implement service-learning	1.8827	.13499
B	Lack of time in the pre-service teacher education curriculum	1.8512	.17766
C	Faculty lack time to plan	1.9286	.13929
D	Lack of alignment of service-learning with institutional roles and rewards.	1.9643	.06964
E	Faculty are unprepared to use service-learning as a teaching method	1.8958	.17805
F	Some faculty not interested in service-learning	1.9286	.13256
G	Faculty are unprepared to develop long-term partnerships	1.9643	.11210
H	Lack of funds	1.8429	.20625
I	Lack of alignment with institutional/department priorities	1.9196	.19309

J	Difficulty communicating with public school teachers	1.9357	.14457
K	Transportation and liability issues	1.8929	.24094
L	Difficulty locating public school teachers interested in service-learning.	1.8730	.17559
M	Lack of service-learning curriculum	1.9643	.18898
N	Difficulty aligning service-learning with state and national teacher education standards.	1.8929	.20893
	Total	1.9230	.13987

Note: The response scale in the survey was structured such that the mean reflected 1 as being ‘not helpful’ and 2 as being ‘helpful’.

Table 5 shows that in general, the strategies suggested for all the fourteen challenges were found to be very helpful to overcome those challenges, the overall average mean being 1.92, which is very close to the perfect mean of 2 on the scale of responses (see the note below Table 5). The Table also shows the means of the strategies range between 1.84 and 1.96. Strategies suggested to solve the problem of “Lack of alignment of service learning with Institutional goals” and the strategies to solve the problem of Faculty being “unprepared to develop long term partnerships” and strategies to address the challenge of “Lack of Service Learning Curriculum” were found to be the most important (means of 1.96).

Based on the respondents’ ratings (see Table 6 in the Appendix), nine of the seventy-seven strategies (i.e., 17, 18, 19, 22, 38, 41, 45, 53 and 58) obtained the maximum mean of 2 each, suggesting that these strategies were believed to be the most appropriate to overcome the respective challenges that stand on the way of implementation of service-learning in pre-service education in Oman. Thirteen other strategies (i.e., 8, 15, 21, 28, 29, 32, 46, 47, 48, 60, 64, 74 and 75) were ranked second as being helpful in overcoming the respective challenges (mean 1.96), fifteen strategies were ranked next with a mean of 1.93 (i.e., 1, 4, 11, 16, 23, 30, 36, 37, 39, 43, 44, 55, 59, 66 and 70). It is a positive indication that nearly 50% of the strategies (37 out of 77) obtained a mean between 1.9 and 2, suggesting that they are seen to be potentially effective in overcoming the challenges specified. The strategies that obtained the least mean were 50 and 10 with means of 1.75 and 1.64 respectively.

It can be observed from Table 6A (see Appendix) that for each challenge listed from ‘A’ to ‘N’, at least one solution was identified as a top ranking strategy – ‘H’ and ‘K’ had one solution each, while the others had two or more. The only exception was with Challenge N which deals with the alignment of service-learning with state or national teacher education standards. All the strategies related to this challenge were not considered to be of great importance.

In response to research question four, the researchers analyzed the responses on the strategies according to profession. Perhaps one can explain the low rating of these strategies in relationship to the absence of Omani teacher education standards. It is not surprising, therefore, that they did not regard those strategies to be of importance.

On analyzing the responses according to profession, the results showed no significant differences between the two groups (faculty and Administrators) in the way they considered the usefulness of the strategies. The exception can be seen with strategy A which addressed the difficulty in aligning service learning with State and National teacher education standards which was found to be significant at 0.05 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Categories of Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges – Differences among EFL Pre-service Teachers in terms of Profession

	Categories	Means		t	Sig.
		Faculty	Admin		
A	Faculty lack time necessary to implement service-learning	1.8643	1.9286	-1.145	.884
B	Lack of time in the pre-service teacher education curriculum	1.8417	1.8750	-.510	.737
C	Faculty lack time to plan	1.9167	1.9583	-.708	.123
D	Lack of alignment of service-learning with institutional roles and rewards.	1.9583	1.9792	-.708	.123
E	Faculty are unprepared to use service-learning as a teaching method.	1.8917	1.9063	-.192	.822
F	Some faculty not interested in service-learning	1.9167	1.9583	-.745	.221
G	Faculty are unprepared to develop long-term partnerships.	1.9750	1.9375	.794	.087
H	Lack of funds	1.8200	1.8429	-.925	.499
I	Lack of alignment with institutional/department priorities	1.9250	1.9063	.228	.826
J	Difficulty communicating with public school teachers	1.9400	1.9250	.244	.706
K	Transportation and liability issues	1.9000	1.8750	.244	.336
L	Difficulty locating public school teachers interested in service-learning.	1.8556	1.9167	-.827	.674
M	Lack of service-learning curriculum	1.9500	2.0000	-.625	.198
N	Difficulty aligning service-learning with state and national teacher education standards.	1.9250	1.8125	1.304	.035
	Total	1.9250	1.9063	-.510	.635

The top ranking strategies that have been identified by faculty and administration as being very helpful in overcoming the challenges can be discussed in terms of the three categories of activities for faculty: teaching, research and service, often viewed as “mutually exclusive” (Young et al., 2007).

Teaching

Experiencing service-learning activities as a small pilot project to begin with, working with faculty to include the integration of service-learning as a departmental goal, having sufficient knowledge about the theory and practice of service-learning and a positive attitude to using it as a teaching method, and integrating service-learning into the

curriculum of courses at the time of curriculum review are some of the strategies identified as being very helpful in overcoming the challenges related to teaching.

Research

Encouraging faculty to apply for research grants and other financial support to engage in research on service-learning, encouraging faculty to research service-learning on the web, promoting research projects and sharing of successful experiences through networks and other activities such as workshops, meetings and conferences topped the list of strategies to promote research in this area and to benefit from available research. Collaborative planning and research were also identified as being very helpful strategies to overcome the challenges. Setting up a resource centre on service-learning and providing faculty with relevant readings on it would also help in faculty research.

Service

Integrating service-learning in existing and future partnerships with public schools, strengthening strategic relationships with existing partners, and getting the pre-service teachers to develop service-learning activities for use in the public schools they go to are some of the strategies that might be helpful to emphasize the service aspect of service-learning.

Administrative support

In addition to the three aspects of teaching, research and service applied in universities worldwide, the success of service-learning depends on the administrative support provided for service-learning activities. Providing recognition to service-learning faculty through certificates, awards and other means (e.g., coverage or mention in university/departmental newsletters), helping to establish partnerships with public schools, and allowing graduate assistants to help in the logistics of service-learning activities would contribute greatly to the success of implementing service-learning in pre-service education.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown that there is recognition of the value of service-learning as a necessary and effective method of learning and that it could be a viable solution for the development of skills and attitudes for citizenship and engagement in the society. There are, however, several challenges faced while implementing service-learning. Any useful method, such as service-learning, cannot be implemented in all contexts in the same way with the same degree of success without the implementers experiencing difficulties or challenges along the way. The key to success nevertheless lies in a clear understanding of the philosophy and principles underlying the method and a firm commitment to overcome the challenges. In this respect, the present study has also shown that while recognizing the challenges, one should not treat them as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities for improvement. Believing in the importance of service-learning, the respondents showed their willingness to learn from the challenges and to deploy appropriate strategies to overcome those challenges and to

ensure the ultimate success of implementing service-learning as an effective educational tool. Thus there is an urgent need for integrating service-learning into pre-service teacher education in order to achieve maximum possible impact on the next generation of teachers, as its benefits far outweigh the challenges.

The current situation in many parts of the world including the Middle East calls for an urgent intervention where youth are guided constructively and trained to direct their positive energies to the service of their societies. There is an increasing need for preparing students for active and responsible citizenship, for greater civic responsibility and engagement, so that they develop knowledge, skills and attitudes which can be used for the improvement of the community and society at large. Service-learning is a powerful approach to teaching and learning and, if properly implemented, helps to develop citizenship, responsibility and many other positive attributes (Billig, 2004; Learn and Serve Clearinghouse, 2010). One of the goals of service-learning should, therefore, be to increase the civic and citizenship skills of students by providing opportunities for students, faculty, staff and administrators to use their talents and skills for the greater good of the community and the country, which must pervade every aspect of work in higher education (Boyte and Hollander, 1999).

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