
Future Educators, Social commitment and Service Learning

Futuros educadores, compromiso social y Aprendizaje-Servicio

未来的教育者、社会承诺和学习-服务

Будущие педагоги, социальная активность и Сервисное обучение

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Abstract

The present work analyses the Service-Learning methodology as a strategy for developing competencies in 162 college students of the Degree of Education of one University. An adaptation of the CASQ (Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire) was provided before and after the implementation of ApS programs for the development of the students' curricular practices. The results show an increase in students' perception of their own leadership and problem-solving skills, among others. In addition, students express to a greater extent their intentions to get involved in future social actions. However, no differences were found in their attitudes towards diversity after the use of this methodology. We conclude that the use of the ApS methodology in the students of the Degrees of Education promotes the development of skills that will facilitate a future professional performance, which meets the need to contribute to the development of more just and committed societies.

Keywords: Service-learning, higher education, civic attitudes, competence, learning strategies.

Resumen

El presente trabajo se centra en el análisis de la metodología de Aprendizaje-Servicio como estrategia de desarrollo de competencias en alumnado universitario. A partir de un estudio pre-post intrasujeto, se analizaron los cambios producidos en las actitudes cívicas, habilidades interpersonales e intenciones de participar en acciones sociales de un grupo de 162 estudiantes de los Grados de Educación en una Universidad. Para ello se suministró una adaptación de la escala Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) antes y después de la implementación de programas de ApS para el desarrollo de sus prácticas curriculares. Los resultados obtenidos muestran un incremento en la percepción de los estudiantes sobre sus propias habilidades de liderazgo o de resolución de problemas, entre otras, y expresan, en mayor medida, sus intenciones de involucrarse en futuras acciones sociales. No se observan, sin embargo, diferencias en sus actitudes hacia la diversidad tras la utilización de esta metodología. Tras el análisis de los datos obtenidos podemos concluir que la utilización de la metodología ApS en los estudiantes de los Grados de Educación promueve el desarrollo de competencias que facilitarán un desempeño profesional futuro que atienda a la necesidad de contribuir al desarrollo de sociedades más justas y comprometidas.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje servicio, educación superior, actitudes cívicas, competencia, estrategias de aprendizaje.

概要

本研究的重点是分析作为大学生能力发展策略的学习服务方法。我们通过对研究对象在实施项目前后对比研究,分析了 大学教育学位的 162 名学生在公民态度、人际交往能力和参与社会实践意愿方面产生的变化。为此,我们对公民态度和技能问卷量表(CASQ)进行了改编,将其应用于旨在发展学生课程实践的学习服务项目实施前后。获得的结果表明,学生对自己的领导能力或解决问题的能力等的看法有所提高,并在更大程度上表达了他们参与未来社会实践的意图。然而,我们没有观察到在使用该方法后学生对多样的态度的改变。通过分析研究数据,我们可以得出以下结论,在教育学位的学生中使用学习服务方法可以促进能力的发展,这将促进其未来的专业表现,满足为更公正的社会的发展做出贡献的需要。

关键词: 学习-服务, 高等教育, 公民态度, 能力, 学习策略。

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена анализу методологии Сервисного обучения (ApS) как стратегии развития компетенций у студентов университета. На основе межсубъектного пре-пост исследования мы проанализировали изменения в гражданских установках, межличностных навыках и намерениях участвовать в социальных акциях в группе из 162 студентов бакалавриата по образованию в университете. С этой целью была проведена адаптация опросника гражданских установок и навыков (CASQ) до и после внедрения программ ApS для развития их учебной практики. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что у студентов повысилось восприятие собственных лидерских качеств или навыков решения проблем, среди прочих, и они в большей степени выражают намерение участвовать в будущих социальных акциях. Однако после применения этой методики никаких различий в их отношении к разнообразию не наблюдается. Проанализировав полученные данные, можно сделать вывод, что использование методологии ApS у студентов бакалавриата в области образования способствует развитию компетенций, которые будут способствовать будущей профессиональной деятельности, отвечающей необходимости вносить вклад в развитие более справедливого и заинтересованного общества.

Ключевые слова: Сервисное обучение, высшее образование, гражданские установки, компетентность, стратегии обучения.

Introduction

The incorporation of the service-learning (SL) methodology into training processes developed at the University enables the accomplishment of learning that will be fundamental to future professional performance. This methodology satisfies the requirements established in article 64.3 of Royal Decree 1791/2010, December 30, which approved the University Student Statute, according to which universities must favor practices of social and citizen responsibility that combine academic learning in the various degree subjects with the provision of service to the community based on improving quality of life and social inclusion and transformation. Thus, SL allows universities to progress toward meeting one of their greatest challenges: uniting the social function of the university with the traditionally recognized ones of research and teaching.

The SL methodology may be defined as one that articulates the learning objectives that define a subject in convergence with real needs presented by a group within its social environment. It implies that the learning acquired within the curricular activity is facilitated by the work that each participant carries out, pedagogically mediated by the teacher and, in collaborative work, by community members known as community partners (Batlle, 2011).

The new educational framework demands the shaping of responsible professionals, committed to their work and willing to transform and improve the reality that surrounds them. In order to institute the changes and innovations that are necessary at the educational and social level, it is imperative for the training of such professionals to be in line with these approaches. In this respect, it is essential that the University prioritize those practices and methodologies that promote students' acquisition of the competencies, abilities, and skills that will help them to achieve the professional profile that the educational context demands, being, in these moments of change and

renewal, one of the most important challenges in our society. On this basis, and after analyzing various didactic methodologies, we consider SL as one that truly supports and contributes to the development of professionals who are not only equipped at the level of knowledge but who also have a strong social commitment, a well-developed ethical and moral sense, an appropriate personal and social development, in addition to a high degree of motivation and empowerment (Martínez-Odría, 2007).

Following the analysis carried out by Eyler et al. (2001), it has been possible to clearly distinguish several themes in the research on SL and its implementation. The themes range from those analyzing the quality criteria that SL projects must have, the institutionalization of this methodology, its dimensions, and its models (Heras-Colàs et al., 2017), to those focused on the perceptions of the different actors involved (teachers, managers, students, etc.), in addition to the fundamental impact of SL on the students (García-Romero et al., 2018). It is precisely this final issue that represents the focus of our interest, since, if we intend to create an innovative, inclusive, and responsible society, the university must train future professionals to be more just, more committed to their profession, more involved with the society around them, and more disposed to facilitate social transformations, beginning from their most immediate environment (Hernández & Miguel, 2017).

Concerning this matter, a large body of research suggests that SL programs, in general, have positive results for students. The said research focuses on six fundamental fields: academic and cognitive development, civic development, vocational and professional development, ethical and moral development, personal development, and social development.

With regard to academic and cognitive development, a review of various studies that was carried out by Cazzell et al. (2014) shows the successes of SL for students, both in higher graduation rates and in superior academic performance. Greater development of conceptual knowledge and skills has also been demonstrated (Ciesielkewicz et al., 2014), along with an improved ability to analyze and synthesize complex information and to apply knowledge (Saz & Ramo, 2015), and an improvement in critical thinking, effort regulation, and metacognitive self-regulation (Hervás et al., 2017).

In relation to civic development, it has been shown that students participating in SL programs improve their civic engagement and social skills (Celio et al., 2011; Hervás & Miñaca, 2015). Similarly, they show a greater predisposition toward public service within their professional development, have a more positive attitude regarding the impact of the service that they perform, and are more concerned about social problems (Liu et al., 2015). Equally, they demonstrate improvement in their civic attitudes and their commitment to community service (Moely & Ilustre, 2019), and they strengthen their social activism, understood as the willingness to help others who are in difficulties, to influence the political structure, to influence social values, and to participate in community action programs (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).

In a similar vein, study has been given to the vocational and professional development of students who have undertaken SL programs, wherein results have included the expansion of vocational awareness and options and of professional competencies such as leadership (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018; Díaz et al, 2019). Furthermore, according to Fernández et al. (2014), students make improvement in skills related to teamwork, in-

formation analysis, problem solving, acceptance of criticism, project design and management, and creative thinking.

As regards social development, it has been observed that when students are involved in SL projects, they improve in areas such as social skills, empathy, prosociability, communication skills, and the social projection of their learning (Folgueiras et al., 2013; Martínez-Usoralde et al., 2016). Improvement is also made in students' coexistence with colleagues and in their interaction with various institutions and agencies (Rodríguez, 2014). Further to this, it has been observed that students improve their appreciation of diversity and fundamental values (Cámara et al., 2017; Miron & Moely, 2006), as, in general, they report feeling very content to work with people of a different race, social class, or culture (Chan et al., 2019). For their part, Einfeld and Collins (2008) associate the participation of students in SL projects with the improvement of multicultural competence, understanding, and commitment to social justice.

In addition, the impact on personal development has received analysis. Chiva-Bartoll et al. (2016) relate the effects of SL to what they label "effective personality", in which four dimensions may be included: academic and social self-realization, self-esteem, and resolution self-efficacy. In such a manner, when students are motivated and when the service stimulates their interest, they are more predisposed to demonstrate their worth and to assume "adult" roles, and they seem to feel more valued and empowered in their activities (Furco, 1996).

All of the above serves to justify the choice of SL as a work and learning methodology within the university, taking into account that it must always combine two elements. On the one hand, learning, and, on the other, service to the community in a structured project in which the work of participants deals with the real needs of the environment for the purpose of improving it (López-Fernández & Benítez-Porres, 2018; Puig et al., 2007). Yet, as Furco (2008) states, there must be a balance between the two elements, since, otherwise, one might speak of other types of practices such as volunteering or field practice (Lorenzo et al., 2019). The SL must guarantee both learning and service, and the benefits must go in both directions, both to the students who provide the service and to the community or institution that receives it.

What differentiates SL from other educational experiences and makes it an effective tool to develop fundamental competencies in students, are its component elements (Martínez-Odría, 2007): protagonism of students as a fundamental basis for their personal, social, and academic development; attention to real needs arising from the community itself; connection to learning objectives; the carrying out of a service project; and reflection, in order to internalize and analyze the actions carried out.

As such, this project was intended to achieve the learning outcomes proposed for each of the subjects that were involved—as collected in their respective teaching guides—as well as to generate an improvement in the quality of the educational process, through the use of active and innovative methodologies, under which the student takes the leading role in their learning, beginning from real experiences that put them in contact with reality. Equally, in line with one of the most important objectives of the SL methodology, the project was intended to encourage in students the social responsibility that is derived from providing services to the community that conform to those needs identified in collaborating institutions.

Method

Objectives

The general objective of this study was to analyze whether the use of SL programs, defined in a clear and effective manner as a methodology for educating university students, benefits the attainment of transversal competences based on improvement in mediating factors of the process, such as self-esteem, pro-social behavior, motivation, empowerment, and ethical commitment.

The study began from the general hypothesis that the application of the SL methodology would affect the attitudes, behaviors, and behavioral intentions of the students, as measured before and after participation in SL-based subjects, in the dimensions: civic action, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, political consciousness, leadership skills, social justice attitudes, and attitudes toward diversity.

Population and Sample

The study was carried out with a sample composed of a total of 162 participants, all of whom were students at the University of XXX. The participants belonged to three groups from two different academic subjects, in the second year of university study: two groups from the Degree in Early Childhood Education and a third group from the Degree in Social Education.

Group 2B from Early Childhood Education was composed of 56 students (53 women and 3 men) aged between 19-28 years ($M = 21.39$, $SD = 2.17$). With respect to group 2C from Early Childhood Education, it was made up of 59 students (52 women and 7 men) aged between 19-30 years ($M = 21.92$, $SD = 2.53$). Finally, the Social Education group consisted of 47 students (39 women and 8 men) aged between 19-46 years ($M = 22.32$, $SD = 4.26$).

The bias in the distribution of students by gender is the usual one and characterizes the studies previously carried out with students undertaking education degrees, which have a predominantly female population (Gialamas et al., 2013; Marín-Díaz et al., 2016).

Instrument

The instrument used was the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ), a self-reported attitudes scale by Moely et al. (2002).

The original scale was validated in two samples of university students ($N = 761,725$) who were studying arts and sciences. The internal consistency of the scale is .88 (Moely et al., 2002). Adaptation of the scale involved its translation and its adaptation to the study context, including the performance of the appropriate validation and reliability study (Cronbach's alpha .98).

The said scale is composed in its final version of 44 items divided into six dimensions. These are presented as statements on a scale of measurement ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Below, we present the dimensions and, in each case, an example of one of the items collected.

- Civic action (composed of 8 items). Analyzes intentions to get involved, in the future, in a community service or action. E.g.: *I intend to participate in a community social action program.*
- Interpersonal and problem-solving skills (12 items). Analyzes students' abilities to listen, work cooperatively, communicate, make friends, put oneself in someone else's place, think logically and analytically, and solve problems. E.g.: *I am able to successfully resolve conflicts with other people as these come my way.*
- Political consciousness (6 items). Analyzes knowledge with respect to current national or local political events or occurrences. E.g.: *I am informed about events that occur in my community.*
- Leadership skills (5 items). Evaluates the subject's perception of their leadership ability and their effectiveness as a leader. E.g.: *I prefer it if someone else takes the initiative in finding solutions.*
- Social justice attitudes (8 items). Analyzes the participant's level of agreement with items that express attitudes relating to the causes of poverty and how social problems may be solved. E.g.: *We need to change people's attitudes in order to solve social problems.*
- Attitudes towards diversity (5 items). Analyzes subjects' attitudes toward diversity and the interest that they express in interacting with people from different cultures. E.g.: *It is difficult for a group to function in an effective way when the people that make it up have diverse backgrounds.*

Data collection and analysis procedure

Working from an within-subjects pretest-posttest design, we analyzed whether there were significant differences in civic attitudes and behaviors, interpersonal and problem-solving skills, political consciousness, leadership skills, social justice attitudes, and, finally, self-reported attitudes toward diversity, by administering the CASQ survey before and after students carried out the practical placement for their course, utilizing the SL methodology.

The scale was administered anonymously so as to attempt to solve the social desirability bias that can occur in this type of tool. However, the students were asked to use an identifier, which facilitated the subsequent pretest-posttest comparison while safeguarding the anonymity of the responses.

The administration of the scale was carried out in a university lecture room on a group basis and students had the necessary time to complete their responses.

The three groups of students were participating in two different subject options: from the Social Education degree (Technological Resources Design for the Socio-educational Field) and from the Early Childhood Education degree (The Inclusive School). The practical curricular placements for both subjects were carried out in accordance with the SL methodology, such that students designed and carried out, in collaboration with the teachers involved, small service-learning projects that responded to the needs observed in their social environment.

These practical placements varied depending on the groups, but they were always undertaken in small groups (4-6 students) and followed the fundamental scheme and

the defining principles of this methodology. The aim was to design systematized SL programs that would satisfy the need for rigorous research that, in turn, might allow us to offer clear results on the effectiveness of this methodology.

To achieve this end, the following objectives were set out in advance of the program's implementation:

- Explore which social institutions in particular might benefit from the use of this teaching methodology.
- Discover the needs of collaborating social institutions.
- Encourage social engagement between university students and various social institutions.
- Design intervention projects based on the needs identified.
- Transfer some of the projects designed into a real context.

Ultimately, 29 SL micro-projects were carried out, with the collaboration of: three centers for preschool and elementary education in the city, a public secondary school, non-profit associations (*Secretariado Gitano* [Gitano Secretariat], *Asociación Jienense de Alcohólicos Rehabilitados* [Jienense Association of Recovered Alcoholics]), a residence for the elderly, and the Red Cross. All the projects were supervised at all times by the university faculty in coordination with the participating organizations. During the development of each project, it was—of course—ensured that all the students involved also carried out those activities necessary to achieve the practical skills proposed in the relevant subject. The approximate duration of the entire process of development for the projects was 12 weeks.

Finally, following completion of the projects, all of the students again completed the CASQ.

Results

In order to check whether there were differences between the pretest and posttest scores in the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Student's *t* test were performed for related samples, using the SPSS Statistic 20 statistical package.

First, we carried out an analysis of the entire questionnaire, checking for the existence of differences among the pretest and posttest scores, both for the complete sample of students and for each of the groups, using Student's *t* test. Statistically significant differences were found in the complete sample (Mdif = -.0738; $t_{162} = -3.320$; $p = .001$), in the Social Education group (Mdif = -.0718; $t_{46} = -2.135$; $p = .038$), and in group 2C of Early Childhood Education (Mdif = -.1108; $t_{55} = -1.017$; $p = .314$). However, in the 2B group of Early Childhood Education, no significant differences were found between the pretest and posttest scores (Mdif = -.0366; $t_{58} = -2.583$; $p = .012$).

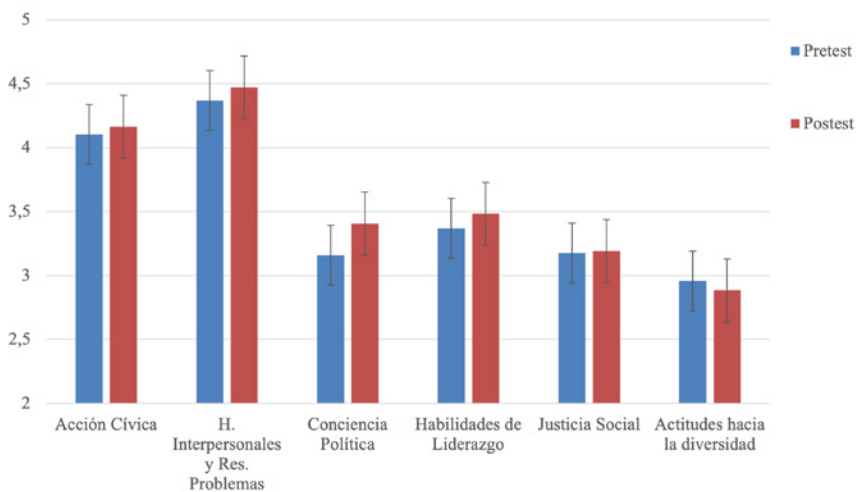
In order to understand whether there were differences between the groups in either the pretest or the posttest measurements, a one-way ANOVA was performed using the scores as the dependent variable and the group as the independent variable. The analysis showed that there were no significant differences between the groups in pretest scores, $F(2,161) = .857$; $Mse = .079$; $p = .426$, nor in posttest scores, $F(2,161) = .457$, $Mse = .041$, $p = .634$.

Further, in order to confirm which specific dimensions of the questionnaire might present significant pretest-posttest intragroup differences, a Student *t* test was performed for the relevant samples for each dimension, through which it was observed that the Social Education group showed significant differences in the dimension of political consciousness (Mdif = -.207; *t*₄₆ = -2.483; *p* = .017) and in that of leadership skills (Mdif = -.241; *t*₄₆ = -3.596; *p* = .001). With regard to group 2B of Early Childhood Education, there were no statistically significant pretest-posttest differences in any of the dimensions. Finally, in group 2C of Early Childhood Education, significant pretest-posttest differences were found in the interpersonal skills and problem solving dimension (Mdif = -.147; *t*₅₈ = -2.447; *p* = .017) and in political consciousness (Mdif = -.218; *t*₅₇ = -2.87; *p* = .006).

When we analyzed the total group of students, we observed that there were significant differences in three of the six dimensions that comprise the questionnaire. Thus, as shown in graph 1, there were significant differences in the following dimensions: interpersonal skills and problem solving (Mdif = -.102; *t*₁₆₂ = -3.12; *p* = .002), political consciousness (Mdif = -.237; *t*₁₆₁ = -3.01; *p* = .003), and leadership skills (Mdif = -.112; *t*₁₆₀ = -2.85; *p* = .005) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Pretest-posttest comparison of all the subjects' scores, by dimensions



When analyzing the total group of students with respect to items, specifically, we observed that within the civic action dimension there were significant differences between pretest and posttest scores only in the item referring to whether the subject plans to get involved in assistance programs for environmental conservation (Mdif = -.185; *t*₁₆₂ = -2.64; *p* = .009). In the interpersonal skills and problem solving dimension, significant differences were observed in six items: on the one hand, there were significant differences pertaining to subjects' assessment of their ability to listen to the opinions of other people (Mdif = -.099; *t*₁₆₂ = -2.11; *p* = .037), and their ability to think logically when solving problems (Mdif = -.135; *t*₁₆₂ = -2.32; *p* = .021). Likewise, there were differences in the subjects' perceived ability to successfully resolve conflicts

that arise between oneself and others (Mdif = - .185; t162 = -2.75; p = .007), and also in the item analyzing subjects' ability to, prior to a conflict, put oneself in someone else's place in order to understand their position (Mdif = - .167; t162 = -2.68; p = .008). Lastly, within this dimension, differences were also observed in the items analyzing subjects' perception of both their ability to think analytically in order to solve problems (Mdif = - .197; t162 = -3.07; p = .002) and their ability to understand a person's situation by putting themselves in their place (Mdif = - .161; t162 = -2.56; p = .011).

As regards the political consciousness dimension, significant differences were observed in the following items: *I am up to date with current affairs* (Mdif = - .166; t162 = -2.32; p = .044); *I am well informed about problems happening in the world* (Mdif = - .102; t162 = -3.12; p = .002); *I am aware of events that are taking place in my community* (Mdif = - .217; t162 = -3.57; p = .000); and *I understand the problems facing my community* (Mdif = - .229; t162 = -2.99; p = .003).

In the leadership skills dimension, there are three items in which differences existed between the pretest and posttest student perceptions: first, *I am a better follower than a leader* (Mdif = - .181; t162 = -2.36; p = .02); second, *I am a good leader* (Mdif = - .194; t162 = -3.01; p = .003); and, lastly, *I prefer it if someone else takes the initiative in finding solutions* (Mdif = - .168; t162 = -2.68; p = .008).

Finally, in the social justice attitudes dimension, there were differences in the extent to which subjects held the view that people are responsible for their own misfortunes (Mdif = .25; t162 = 2.52; p = .013) and that to understand people's problems we do not need to look beyond them as individuals (Mdif = - .28; t162 = -3.031; p = .003). There were no differences between the pretest and the posttest in respect of the attitudes towards diversity dimension.

Discussion and Conclusions

Service-learning has become a powerful tool that helps students to depart from theoretical learning and to become closer to the world of practice, by combining service to the community with the achievement of set learning objectives (Rusu et al., 2015).

The results of this study suggest that there are statistically significant differences in the attitudes of students following their participation in SL projects. This leads us to consider that participation in the various programs carried out has caused students to develop, on the one hand, more positive attitudes, and on the other, changes in their perception of participation. It is important to note that no differences were observed between the groups in the pretest or in the posttest scores, which suggests that no group was more predisposed than the others prior to carrying out the projects, nor had they benefited differently at the end of the projects. Rather, all of the participating students—independent of their degree of study—modified their attitudes with respect to the dimensions analyzed.

Nevertheless, differences can be observed regarding the dimensions in which each group obtained significant differences. Thus, when analyzing the data by group, we noted significant changes among Social Education students in the political consciousness and leadership skills dimensions. In the Early Childhood Education groups, differences were also observed in political consciousness, but not in leadership skills or interpersonal and problem-solving skills. These results may bring to light the differences observed between students of Early Childhood Education and those taking Social Edu-

cation. Together, the more service-oriented aspect of Social Education studies and the characteristics defining the profile of graduates in these studies mean that it is unsurprising that these students experience a greater awakening of political consciousness.

In general terms, these results are in line with those of Bernadowsky, Perry, and Del Greco (2013) or Chiva-Bartoll et al. (2019), inasmuch as they verify how teaching students who participate in SL become people who are more reflective and more capable of solving problems of social interaction in relation to their course-mates and the other social agents involved. Therefore, it may be noted that SL bears an influence both on content learning and on professional growth.

The same may be said of leadership skills—skills that are highly sought after with respect to future graduates. If we analyze the profile of these degree studies, it may be suggested that the objective of Social Education proceeds from the development of critical capacity and ethical responsibility in the analysis of social realities, favoring the integration of individuals and groups, and promoting the development of the community. Such training would appear to require the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop intervention actions and socio-educational mediation in different settings, for which leadership skills will be necessary.

The results obtained are consistent with those of Ruso et al. (2015) to the extent that no difference was observed in the civic action dimension: those researchers also found no differences in this variable when analyzing the implementation of SL programs through an online tutoring program. However, Ruso et al. (2015) did observe differences in attitudes toward diversity. In our study, meanwhile, no differences were observed in the attitudes toward diversity scale, and these results coincide with those obtained by Moely et al. (2002). However, the latter group of authors affirm that this absence of change in self-reported perceptions may be due to limitations of the questionnaire (CASQ) in the aforementioned subscale, or, alternatively, to SL practices only having a very weak influence on students' attitudes toward diversity. In respect of our study, we consider that the lack of change in this dimension may be attributable to the first reason mentioned by the authors of the 2002 study, or, on the other hand, it may be due to the changes produced in attitudes to diversity not being as easily observable or perceptible by students as those in a dimension such as problem solving, where such changes might be more clearly observed.

That is to say, on the one hand, a student may clearly perceive following the completion of a work placement how they have improved in their ability to solve problems, in their capacity to put themselves in someone else's place or situation, or in their knowledge of the social policy of their community, given that all students who participate in SL will have to face this kind of situation; however, on the other hand, not all students who undertake SL will have to face situations that might produce a change in attitude toward diversity. Perhaps it might have been of interest to have analyzed how many of the students involved in SL practices worked in a setting where they had to face situations that involved cultural diversity and functional diversity, among other kinds, and to analyze whether there was a change in the attitudes of those particular students. This limitation of our study should be taken into account in future research.

Let us turn to a detailed analysis of the changes reported in civic action. The students, through their participation in SL practices, showed the expected changes both in civic attitudes and in community integration behaviors, and, furthermore, expressed plans based on the desire to involve themselves in civic activities in the future. The results show an important change in the willingness expressed by students to involve them-

selves in assistance programs. Although in the initial survey all students expressed their willingness to participate in civic actions, a significant change was observed following students' completion of their SL placements: above all, they were much more explicit in their responses to the survey and claimed that they were more interested in participating in civic actions.

These results may be attributable to the fact that through offering students the chance to carry out these practices in SL, they were allowed the opportunity to interact with people of a different age, social class, and cultural environment from the people with whom they interact every day, providing them with an opportunity to develop behaviors that help them to communicate and to resolve conflicts. Further to this, SL placements will require students to be able to develop initiative and creativity and to be able to react flexibly to the various unexpected situations that may arise, in addition to demanding from them the responsibility to achieve proposed objectives in an effective manner, so as to accomplish the final intended goal. This has also been observed in changes in the responses concerning leadership skills, a dimension closely related to that of interpersonal and problem-solving skills. The results indicate that the students claimed to feel better disposed to take on different roles after they had carried out their SL placements: there was a strengthening of responses relating to recognizing themselves as superior leaders, and of those referring to perceiving themselves as good followers of others when in the presence of a leader.

However, such changes are not only observed in the students' intentions to participate in projects, but there are also substantial variations in their perceptions regarding their interpersonal and problem-solving skills. The students involved in this type of practical activity assert that following the completion of the SL placement they had achieved an improvement in their ability to solve problems, that they were more willing to listen to the opinions of other people, were able to think more logically to solve problems, and believed themselves more capable of successfully resolving conflicts that might arise between themselves and others, while also having a greater capacity to put themselves in someone else's place. The possibility of experiencing other realities, of being able to see the problems that can arise in other communities, and of feeling part of the solution to these problems, seems to offer the students the possibility of feeling not simply more aware of the social realities around them, but more able to offer their help to change things in their social environment.

Another, important, dimension to obtain significant changes following the service-learning intervention is that referring to the political consciousness of the students—perhaps one of the dimensions that appears most deficient at this time, given the “political neglect” attributed to youth today (Levine & López, 2002).

There are many studies confirming that, compared to previous generations, young people are less interested in politics and public affairs, that their knowledge of political institutions and the democratic process is deficient, that they consume less political information, and that they are less disposed to participate as citizens, whether through elections or through other channels (Pirie & Worcester, 2000). Similarly, younger generations have been identified as protagonists of the decline in civic engagement, which—according to proponents of social capital—is a key element for the functioning and performance of democratic governments (Putnam, 2000).

Studies undertaken on this subject contend that the majority of the youth population in Spain is not interested in politics and that their level of civic engagement is very low (INJUVE, 2005a, 2005b; Valls, 2006); however, in our study, an increase was observed in the degree to which students claimed to be more informed and interested in the public and political affairs of the community. Again, we recognize that having to place themselves in contact with the social reality of associations and educational centers, among other organizations, led these students to perceive at greater proximity how social policy decisively influences the actions that are carried out and that may be carried out by institutions near to them, and to understand in greater depth the mechanisms involved in this relationship between institutions. This increased proximity seems to influence—as noted in the results of Moely et al. (2002)—the subjects' perception of social justice, as they confront realities and situations that were, until that moment, unknown to them, and have to face situations looking out from the reality of the institutions that attend to them on a regular basis.

Overall, a change was observed in the attitudes of students from different degree courses who—in the study of various subjects—carried out service-learning activities for the development of their practical curricular study. This suggests the possibilities of SL as a work methodology in the university: one that unites teachers, students, and the social environment in the task of training new professionals who will be more committed to society and more attentive to its latent demands (Mergler et al., 2017).

In conclusion, this study has stemmed from the effort to objectively analyze whether students participating in SL programs undergo a change in their perception of their own attitudes and intentions toward getting involved in civic actions.

Previous studies permitted us to anticipate certain possibilities for the effects of SL vis-a-vis our starting hypothesis. Therefore, a pretest-posttest study was carried out using independent groups, with the aim of analyzing whether there were differences in students' self-reported perceptions with regard to six dimensions, before and after their participation in service-learning projects.

The adaptation of the CASQ questionnaire into Spanish offered us a reliable tool for the analysis of these dimensions.

The research undertaken confirmed that there were significant modifications in three of the six dimensions analyzed using the CASQ. Changes observed in the self-reported attitudes of students reflect the possibility that the use of SL as a work methodology in the university would facilitate not only the learning of the content, but, in addition, the development of transversal competences among students.

Nevertheless, the present study has limitations that are chiefly marked by the inability to compare the results obtained with those of control groups carrying out practical placements without making use of this methodology, and by a lack of qualitative data that might reinforce or explain the observed changes. In future research, we intend to use a greater number of instruments and measures to facilitate triangulation and to offer improved possibilities for interpreting both qualitative and quantitative data.

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