Chapter 14
The Role of Evaluation in Service Learning in Economics and Business:
Systematic Review and Proposal of Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, a systematic review of the literature on evaluations of service-learning projects in the area of business and economics has been carried out. The authors have analyzed the four basic parts of evaluation: who evaluates, when to evaluate, how to evaluate, and what to evaluate. Subsequently, an evaluation proposal has been made for each of the agents involved, taking into account each of these dimensions. One of the main conclusions is that reflection is a fundamental part of the evaluation process, as well as of the student learning process because it allows them to deepen the lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

Service-Learning is a learning methodology that has begun to be strongly implemented in recent years. This methodology stands out for its great potential in the educational field because it allows students to learn theoretical concepts through a meaningful service to the community. Additionally, it allows students to develop both transversal and civic skills, which makes it a very useful tool in Business education. Some research has shown that there are certain skills that are essential for good job development (for example, see Bovinet, 2007; Clarke, 1997; Done, 2011). One example are civic skills, which allow students to develop greater global and cultural awareness; another example is entrepreneurial skills, which include critical thinking, technological skills, lifelong learning, flexibility, adaptation to change, teamwork, initiative, problem solving, and communication skills, among others. All these skills have become highly prized in the labor market due to the scarcity of candidates who possess them. Among the reasons for this situation, we can find the shortcomings of traditional education. This education has been heavily influenced by passive methodologies in which lectures and memorization of concepts prevail. However, numerous studies have confirmed that these skills are developed when active methodologies, such as service-learning, are used (Sandmann, et al., 2009; Smith-Tolken, 2013).

Service-learning is sometimes confused with activities such as volunteering because of the community service it offers, or with Business internships because of the practical learning of theoretical concepts. However, this tool combines the benefits of both, i.e., the learning of theoretical concepts, and the development of moral and entrepreneurial skills.

A fundamental aspect of this methodology is the evaluation of the projects. In this phase of service-learning is quite important to know whether the proposed objectives have been achieved. One of these objectives is to know if the student has really learned. Numerous tools are used for this purpose, such as the reflective journals, focus group, surveys, interviews, and written reflection, among others. Most of the works in the existing literature are about the implementation of this methodology; however, very few works have analyzed the evaluation process of service-learning (Ruiz-Corbella and García-Gutiérrez, 2019). That is why the aim of this chapter is to propose an evaluation tool, as complete as possible, in the field of Economics and Business. In order to achieve this goal, the authors will carry out a systematic review of the literature on service-learning evaluation procedures, in which the different evaluations applied in projects will be reviewed.

With this review, the authors will classify the works based on the following dimensions: What to evaluate (students, project, community), who evaluates (students, teachers, social organizations, beneficiaries), when to evaluate (before, during and/or after project) and how to evaluate (quantitative/qualitative methods and direct or indirect methods). In this way, it will be shown what has been done in the area of economics and business; this will allow the authors to make an evaluation proposal, as complete as possible, which encompasses all these dimensions.

The structure of this chapter begins with a background section in which we will review the concept of service-learning in the existing literature, its benefits and drawbacks, examples of application of this tool in the area of economics and business, as well as the process of evaluation of this methodology and the importance of reflection in learning. In the next section, a systematic literature review of the evaluation process in the area of economics and business will be carried out. Specifically, the methodology followed by the systematic review is described, the preliminary findings of the review are described and, finally, the general results of the study are presented. Subsequently, an evaluation proposal for this teaching tool will be made. In this section, the authors propose an evaluation for the project students,

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