Abstract: Service Learning is a contemporary pedagogical approach which involves active learning activities. This approach has been widely practiced internationally and due to various issues concerning the employability of our local graduates, it has started to gain its popularity. Service learning is a form of experiential learning which provides the opportunity for students to impart knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to a chosen community in order to solve its problems and issues. This paper describes a reflective journey of service learning among Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) students to an academy in Kuantan, known as Akademi Menara Gading. This service learning was implemented as one of the methods in conducting GV3324 (Teaching of Writing Skills in an ESL Context). This paper highlights how service learning was implemented as one of the assessment methods of the course, the activities conducted by the TESL students and also presents some feedback given by the TESL students and community on their experiences.

Keywords: service learning; teaching writing; English as a Second Language (ESL); community-based learning; experiential learning.

INTRODUCTION

Service Learning is a contemporary pedagogical approach which involves active learning activities which aim to link the classroom and community through courses with a transformative experiential education (Jacoby, 2009). Recently, service learning has become more prevalent in teacher preparation programmes with the intent of providing the opportunity for pre-service teachers to become engaged with the real target participants (Hilderbrand & Schultz, 2015) as well as preparing them to enter the workplace (Huff et al., 2016). Ryan and Callahan (2002) define service learning as an equal relationship that merges both field experience and sustainable community service, to offer learning opportunities that link academics to the service, so both the students and the community partner benefits.

Giles and Eyler (1994) examined the perceptions of college students about their service learning experiences, questioning if these experiences predicted a more socially just way of thinking and sustained community participation and service. Findings from the study indicated that the participants were optimistic about the impact of service learning programmes, and that the programmes might be effective in increasing commitment and participation. More specifically, when integrated effectively into coursework, service learning can provide experiences for pre-service teachers to become engaged with real life experiences (Galvan & Parker, 2011; Harrison, 2013).

A major shift in university coursework involves activities outside the traditional classroom in which students are required to apply knowledge from the coursework in real-life service learning environments (Hullender et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Melor et al. (2010), Nevertheless, there are still a lot of beginner teachers who are not ready to face the challenges in the classrooms. Since service learning approaches to education have been shown
to provide many benefits related to academic performance, motivation, ability to work with others, leadership, overall satisfaction, and preparation for work (Levkoe et al., 2014; Zoltowski, 2013), this approach is integrated and applied in one of the courses taken by Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) students. In this study, the researchers purposefully designed tasks and assignments with the intention of developing knowledge through authentic experiences by way of social interaction and shared activities. This allowed the students to view real problems and experiences through multiple perspectives as they collaborated with community as well as developing learning experiences and activities to meet the goals of the students.

This paper describes a reflective journey of service learning among Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) students to an academy in Kuantan, known as Akademi Menara Gading. This service learning was implemented as one of the methods in conducting GV3324 (Teaching of Writing Skills in an ESL Context). This paper highlights how service learning was implemented as one of the assessment methods of the course, the activities conducted by the TESL students and also presents some feedback given by the TESL students and community on their experiences.

“ENGLISH WRITING IS AN ART: WRITING IS THE PAINTING OF THE VOICE”

Prior to the programme, the TESL students studied and examined the principles, techniques and approaches in teaching ESL writing. They also discussed various methods of responding to students’ writing and assessing writing. Students were guided with a sound knowledge base in teaching writing emphasizing on the practical teaching of ESL writing, particularly the implementation of the syllabus, the adoption and adaptation of relevant writing activities in the classroom. Students were encouraged to brainstorm, discuss and plan in order to prepare a mini lesson for the teaching of writing.

The programme, “English Writing is an Art” with the theme “Writing is the Painting of The Voice” which was conducted at Akademi Menara Gading, Kuantan, Pahang. Akademi Menara Gading is an academy funded the Foundation of Abdulaziz Palace which comprises of 149 form 4 students aged 16 years old from different schools in Kuantan who were selected from the underprivileged group. These underprivileged students were funded by the foundation to assist their learning and prepare them for their Malaysia Examination Certificate (SPM).

During this 2-day programme, 39 year two students of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) were involved in assisting 141 form four students of the Akademi Menara Gading. At Akademi Menara Gading, the form four students are provided with extra classes where teachers were appointed to teach them and to give them extra classes without any financial implication on the students. For this programme, the TESL students were divided into eight groups and each group was assigned to come out with a lesson focusing on writing skills.

![Picture 1: The Students with The Dean of the Faculty of Education (UKM) and The Manager of Yayasan Istana Abdulaziz]
During the programme, the TESL students were given opportunity to interact and facilitate the students’ learning particularly in improving their English language writing skills. The following pictures depicts some of the activities conducted during the programme.

Picture 2: The students of Akademi Menara Gading were briefed by the TESL students on the objectives of the programme

Picture 3: One of the activities conducted during the programme

Picture 4: Students discussing in a group

Among the writing activities conducted by the TESL students were ‘Branch Map’, ‘Burger Concept’, ‘Know Yourself’, ‘The 3R-Map’, ‘Zoom-in’ and many more. All of these activities had integrated the element of game-based learning and fun learning which required the students to move around, interact with team members, and also solve problem. Students were also exposed to different techniques and strategies in developing writing skills. At the end of the
programme, the TESL students and the students of the Akademi Menara Gading were asked to reflect their experiences for the 2-day programme.

SERVICE LEARNING FOR TEACHING WRITING IN AN ESL CONTEXT: THE IMPACTS

TESL Students

Overall, the TESL students were very positive about their service learning experiences. Feedback received from the TESL students that service learning evaluations integrated in the course enhanced learning. One of the TESL students commented, “We were so grateful to be given the chance to teach the students of Akademi Menara Gading. Apart from teaching, we were learning at the same time. It was very beneficial. We really hope the programme benefits the students too!”

The TESL students also commented that they learnt the importance of developing relationships with students. From the programme, they believed they had the opportunity to experience real issues with low proficiency learners. Apart from that, this programme also strengthens their collaboration skills and teamwork.

Students of Akademi Menara Gading

Among the responses written by the students of Akademi Menara Gading, majority of them had mentioned that the activities conducted were fun and enjoyable. One of the students wrote, “I very enjoy today with UKM’s students because they teach me how to write an essay with simple way. Before this, I never got higher mark in writing essay. Facilitator is so helpful, fun and always support us. I can get many tips about essay and my writing.”

In another response, the student wrote, “What I get today is about how to do argumentative essay, speech, search main idea and more that relate with writing skills. The students from UKM always teach me how make essay with easy way that is so fun to me. I enjoy what they teach because they have a lot of knowledge than me. The students from UKM always teach writing skills to make any writing skills become good than before.” From the answers given by the students, it could be concluded that the 2-day programme was a success. The students were very happy and that the programme had impacted on their learning skills especially on writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Given the success of the service learning programme and student learning, it appears that implementing service learning within coursework can hold great potential for contextualizing instruction in authentic settings, and preparing pre-service teachers to effectively apply what they have learnt in a real setting. The findings of this study demonstrate that service learning approach can play an important role in the preparation of pre-service teachers. Finally, service learning approach offers students and educators opportunities to make a difference through transformative experiential education.
REFERENCES


