



LEARNER PERSONALITY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN EFL SERVICE-LEARNING COURSES AT AN GIANG UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Service learning has become an important teaching tendency in higher education by linking academic knowledge with community engagement. At the same time, understanding of personality traits such as introversion and extroversion is crucial for inclusive teaching, as in reality, student diversity often brings about teaching challenges. For instance, introverts may struggle with communication while extroverts engage more easily. To balance the learning environment, thus, this requires teachers to design activities that support all learners and engage them in lessons. At the same time, studies show that innovative methods can enhance students' confidence, communication, and participation. Service learning, inevitably, reshapes traditional instruction by emphasizing collaboration, reflection, and differentiated activities, and personality awareness is assumed to be able to foster a learning environment and ensure fairness. This writing, thus, reviews the definition and benefits of service learning, explores introversion and extroversion, and then proposes teaching implications for inclusive learning environments. The study also highlights how experiential strategies prepare students for future collaboration while promoting meaningful outcomes for both learners and communities.

Keywords: personality difference, engagement, service learning, introversion, extroversion

1. Introduction

To enhance educational quality, it is vital to nourish contemporary, dynamic pedagogical approaches. In the context of foreign language education in general and particularly

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English as a Foreign Language (EFL), students benefit from communicative, learner-centered, and relevant-to-real-life methodologies. Luckily, service-learning courses propose an efficient way to meet these requirements. Specifically, they enable students to utilize classroom information in real-world contexts while benefiting the community, thereby providing advantages for both educators and students (McLeod, 2002, pp. 20-21).

Inevitably, students come to classes with diverse personal characteristics. As a result, personality differences affect students' involvement in learning tasks and community activities within service-learning contexts. This involvement subsequently influences language learning performance, as active participation and meaningful reflection often yield improved results. Research findings prove that features like openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion are factors positively associated with second-language competence (Chen, He, Swanson, Cai, & Fan, 2022, pp. 851-853). Furthermore, the study confirms that personality and emotions profoundly influence motivation and engagement in language learning (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012, pp. 639-641). The results demonstrate that personality traits affect student engagement in service-learning programs and the outcomes derived from these experiences.

This review aims to explore the role of personality in service-learning courses. It focuses on how the lessons trigger differences in learners' participation, reflection, and collaboration during community-based activities as a result of being introverted and extroverted learners. The paper also discusses how balanced learning activities can support different personality types, improve students' confidence and skills, and encourage meaningful engagement. Finally, it suggests that considering personality differences in course design can enhance both student learning and community outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Service Learning

2.1.1 Definition of "Service Learning"

Learning through community service originally appeared in the United States in the 1960s. Normally, the one called service learning (SL) or community-based learning (CBL) provides chances to combine classroom study and social involvement, helping students connect what they learn in theory with real practice (McLeod, 2017, pp. 20-21; Nchaga, 2025, p. 47).

According to Jacoby (2003), service learning is a type of experiential education. It allows students to apply the knowledge and skills they gain in class to real-world situations. This approach combines academic learning with practice and helps students develop important human abilities by engaging with real contexts and reflecting on their experiences.

Jacoby (2003) also notes that service learning, a kind of experiential education, lets students take what they learn in class and use it in real situations. Thus, this approach

helps learners build important personal skills by combining academic knowledge with practice. In that case, students engage with real contexts and reflect on their experiences in a structured way, which strengthens both learning and personal growth.

From an educational perspective, SL is considered highly effective as it fosters active involvement and student autonomy, in contrast to passive classroom learning (pp. 1-3). Baker (2019) contended that community-based service learning is a novel and efficacious pedagogical approach in second language education. Integrating classroom instruction with authentic community engagement provides learners with substantial opportunities to practice language in real contexts, enhances their communicative abilities, and emphasizes the communicative goals essential to modern language education.

Successful service learning depends on the cooperation of four main groups. Administrators give support at the institutional level. Faculty plan and guide the learning process. Community partners create real opportunities for students to engage. Students actively participate and reflect on what they learn. When these groups work together, service learning becomes both a stronger way of teaching and a valuable contribution to society.

2.1.2 Advantages of Service Learning

Service learning, along with academic and personal benefits, will enhance students' interpersonal and professional skills. Hence, engagement in service learning helps learners cultivate competencies in communication, leadership, cooperation, and collaboration, with an increased appreciation for diversity and a diminished tendency toward stereotypical thinking. Studies reveal that students participating in service learning report greater satisfaction with their education and exhibit increased persistence and performance in college (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Low, 2010, p. 12).

Beyond students' most visible learning outcomes, communities benefit greatly from this teaching strategy. Specifically, the method engages local organizations in expanded services, fresh ideas, and innovative strategies to address social challenges. Next, SL projects can reinforce existing programs, support new initiatives, and contribute to community-based research aligned with organizational goals (Cruz & Giles, 2000, p. 12). Moreover, community partners gain access to motivated students who bring energy, skills, and new perspectives to collaborative work (p. 12).

Service learning ensures that academic objectives are achieved while simultaneously generating benefits for the community (pp. 1-2). Indeed, learners gain expected educational outcomes while contributing to society through their engagement. Moreover, SL equips students with a wide range of transferable skills, including problem-solving, critical and analytical thinking, teamwork, presentation and communication, planning, and decision-making. The authentic communicative environment also provides opportunities to test and refine language abilities while reinforcing learners' awareness of their social roles and responsibilities (Eyler & Giles, 1999, pp. 4-5).

Additionally, learners gain substantial academic, personal, and civic benefits from classroom instruction and purposeful community engagement. This teaching orientation, as noted by Cress, Collier, Reitenauer, and Associates, offers opportunities to connect to real life by exposing learners to real-world connections between academic content and community challenges. Therefore, it will deepen their understanding of social, political, and economic contexts (p. 7). Thus, such experiences compel learners to apply their intellectual abilities to address community issues, thereby strengthening disciplinary knowledge and developing practical problem-solving skills.

Another important benefit of service learning is the change from passive knowledge intake to active involvement. As a result, students transition from passive information recipients to "co-creators of knowledge," collaborating with professors, peers, and community partners to cultivate significant learning outcomes.

2.2. The Concept of Introversion and Extroversion

2.2.1 Personality

Language learners show differences in how they learn and in the results they achieve because each learner has unique personal traits. These differences are often called individual learner differences (ILDs). ILDs include age, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, learning strategies, and personality. Personality has received much attention in second language learning research because it influences how learners think, interact, and respond to classroom experiences (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012, pp. 639–640).

Dörnyei (2005) describes personality as a group of fairly stable traits that make one learner different from another. These traits affect how learners behave in the classroom. Since personality influences communication, participation, and collaboration, it has become an important factor in language teaching and learner-centered approaches (p. 24).

2.2.2 Introversion and Extroversion

Introversion and extroversion are two key personality traits that describe how people relate to the world. Stewart (2019, pp. 47–51) notes that introverts usually turn inward. They focus on their thoughts and feelings, prefer quiet settings, and enjoy activities such as reading or writing. They frequently find it more comfortable to work independently. For introverts, energy comes from personal reflection and private space rather than from social interaction.

Extroverts, in contrast, turn outward. They gain energy from meeting people and engaging in outside activities. Extroverted individuals enjoy group work, conversations, and active roles in their communities. They look for stimulation in their surroundings and feel most involved when they are with others. Social situations give them motivation and energy, which helps them succeed in collaborative environments.

These two traits show clear differences in how people interact with their environment. Introverts may perform better in tasks that require focus, independent thinking, and concentration, while extroverts often do well in teamwork, communication,

and active participation. Both tendencies add to the variety of human behavior and learning styles, showing that personality plays an important role in how people respond to similar situations.

3. Implication for Teaching through Service Learning

It is inevitable that personality differences such as introversion and extroversion strongly influence how students learn and participate. Such ways of learning and participation in class are mainly influenced by differences resulting from two opposite orientations of being quiet and outgoing. Accordingly, considering personality differences in teaching is of urgent importance, as it involves teachers in designing appropriate strategies to meet diverse needs and foster inclusive classrooms. In other words, teachers can design differentiated activities, ensure balanced participation, promote confidence-building, apply flexible assessment, create a supportive environment, and encourage skill development to support both introverted and extroverted students. Similarly, different activities help students learn in their own way. Design tasks suited to both personality types; hence, in demand among teachers. Specifically, introverts may benefit from reflective writing, independent projects, or online discussion forums. On the other hand, extroverts may excel in group debates, role-plays, and presentations. This variety helps teachers maximize their learners' engagement through methods that draw on their strengths and involve skill practice beyond their comfort zones.

The next consideration is ensuring that each learner has balanced participation to keep learning fair. On such premises, classroom strategies should offer both introverted and extroverted learners equal opportunities to contribute. Besides, pair work, mixed-group activities, and role rotation can help balance participation. Specifically, an introverted student might be assigned the role of note-taker or researcher in a group, while an extroverted student could serve as the discussion leader. In the next activity, roles are rotated so each learner experiences both quiet reflection and active speaking. As a result, no one dominates or withdraws due to shared participation.

Meanwhile, confidence-building helps students become stronger communicators. To meet this, teachers should encourage introverted students to gradually share ideas and guide extroverted ones to listen actively and reflect more deeply. In this way, their analytical skills can be strengthened. Additionally, introverts might first contribute through short written notes before speaking, whereas extroverts could be asked to summarize group discussions to practice careful listening.

Next, using different methods to assess learning highlights all strengths. Teachers should implement varied methods such as oral presentations, written reflections, peer feedback, and community engagement. Flexible assessment captures each learner's abilities. Furthermore, instead of relying on a single assessment format, teachers should combine individual and group assessments to provide equal opportunities for students with different personalities to demonstrate their learning.

Creating a safe and supportive classroom ensures that everyone feels comfortable. Thus, teachers should build a safe and supportive environment. In that case, introverts need encouragement to overcome anxiety, while extroverts require organized opportunities to channel their energy effectively. For example, teachers could allow introverts to practice presentations in smaller groups before presenting them to the whole class. Extroverts could also be put in charge of group projects to channel their energy positively. Moreover, debriefing sessions following community work may enable students to discuss challenges, celebrate successes, and develop resilience.

Creating a safe and supportive classroom helps learners feel comfortable. Accordingly, teachers should create a safe and encouraging atmosphere. This is because introverts need encouragement to overcome anxiety, while extroverts benefit from organized opportunities to direct their energy productively. Hence, teachers might allow introverts to rehearse presentations in smaller groups before addressing the whole class. At the same time, group projects could assign leadership roles to extroverts, allowing them to channel their energy constructively. Furthermore, debriefing sessions after community work can allow students to share challenges, celebrate successes, and build resilience.

It is assumed that skill development prepares students for the future and that incorporating inclusive service learning activities into the curriculum is therefore a powerful way to achieve this. Teachers should design service learning and language courses so that both introverted and extroverted students can step outside their comfort zones and participate meaningfully. Frequently, introverted students may take on roles in research, reflection, or written documentation through which confidence in communication will be facilitated. In contrast, extroverted individuals prefer group discussions, leading, presentations, or community outreach efforts, thereby strengthening their reflective and critical thinking skills. Such a balance facilitates each personality type's contribution and, at the same time, develops new abilities. Also, structuring this learning orientation in this way helps teachers not only foster fairness but also prepare them for real-world collaboration and communication.

With prior preparation and guidance for students' service-learning tasks, teachers could provide learners with foundational knowledge, orientation sessions, and resources so learners can understand the objectives and have the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully. For instance, a pre-service workshop on communication strategies can equip introverts and extroverts with community members.

4. Conclusion

Considering learner personality during service-learning courses represents an important change in teaching practice. By paying attention to individual learner differences, such as introversion and extroversion, both students and teachers gain benefits from this approach. It allows students to build confidence, improve reflection, and strengthen collaboration while engaging with community projects. At the same time, teachers can

provide more focused support and create balanced activities that encourage active involvement. This helps address gaps often found in traditional teaching methods. With careful planning and diverse assessment, service learning can use personality differences as a resource for growth, leading to stronger student development and more meaningful connections between universities and communities.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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