

Specifics of Measuring Social and Personal Responsibility of University Students After Completion of a Service-Learning Course in Slovak Conditions

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Abstract

This study at a university in Slovakia asked two questions: (1) Does completion of a service-learning course lead to changes in students' social and personal responsibility and their attitudes toward community service? (2) Are personal and social responsibility and attitudes toward community service correlated? Service-learning and the third mission of the university are almost unknown in Slovak higher education, and likewise no relevant test instruments adapted to Slovak conditions currently exist. Consequently, we adopted a scale from abroad—Conrad and Hedin's (1981) Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS). We also used qualitative research methods. Compared to a control group, the service-learning students had statistically significant higher posttest scores in the Social Welfare, Duty, Performance of Responsible Acts, and Global Responsibility subscales. The research results revealed a need for new measuring tools that are sensitive to the specific context of service-learning implementation in Slovakia.

Keywords: service-learning, social and personal responsibility, attitude toward community service, higher education

The nature of higher education is currently determined by several factors. Over the course of recent decades, the interest of universities has shifted from their original focus to two main roles: education and research. Universities thus are key actors in economic and cultural development and in the transformation into institutions committed to industry and society in general. Today's universities are considering their role for society and their relationships with its constituent parts, institutions and communities. This link between higher education and society is considered the third mission of universities. The third mission concept generally includes many of the emerging requirements in relation to universities, in particular the requirement to play a more prominent role in stimulating the use of knowledge to achieve social, cultural, and economic development. A strategy that has been successfully developed in

the context of the third mission of universities for several decades around the world is service-learning. Thanks to this strategy, universities perform their core missions in a comprehensive manner and prepare a new generation of professionals who can integrate their acquired academic qualities and professional competencies with social responsibility and an active implementation of their civic roles in society.

The development of service-learning as well as civic engagement and the attitudes toward it are determined by historical, political, cultural, social, and institutional factors. These factors also greatly limit research opportunities in this area. The aim of our research was to find whether there were changes in the students' social and personal responsibility and attitudes toward community service due to the completion of a service-learning course, and find out if there is any correlation between personal

and social responsibility and attitudes toward community service. The correlation test was used to provide an adequate measuring tool for measuring personal and social responsibility in courses based on service-learning in an environment where service-learning is almost unknown and the discussion about the third mission of universities is just at its beginning. It has been a challenge to assess service-learning in Slovakia because the available methods, instruments, and terms do not resonate with the cultural and linguistic context because they have been normed on societies with different value systems.

Context of Service-Learning Development in Slovakia

Service-learning is a pedagogical strategy that links education and community engagement. Therefore, the context and possibilities for its development in Slovakia need to address the educational systems on the one hand, as in our study with its specific focus on higher education, and the form of solidarity and civic engagement on the other. The educational system and civic engagement in Slovakia are influenced not only by the country-specific historical, political, economic, and social situation, but also by policy at the European level. The directions set up by European institutions can play an important role in future service-learning development in a national context. EU countries are responsible for their own education and training systems, but the European Union helps them set joint goals and share good practices.

In 2000, the European Council introduced the Lisbon Agenda, in which utilitarian knowledge production and university knowledge transfer were placed high on the political agenda. Since the Lisbon Agenda, universities are now perceived as key players in the debate about policy measures to meet the target proposed by the Lisbon Agenda in 2010 (European Council, 2010) of turning the European economy into “the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.” The European Commission sets the need of connecting universities and society in several communications, chiefly the following: *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (Commission of the European Communities, 2003), *Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to Make Their Full Contribution to the Lisbon Strategy* (Commission of the

European Communities, 2005), *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation* (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).

In the publication *Needs and Constraints Analysis of the Three Dimensions of Third Mission Activities* (E3M, 2008), the authors have made clear the need for changing the role of universities from teaching and research institutions to transforming themselves into key players in the knowledge economy in relation to society at large. It is also clear that this relationship with the “outside world” should be focused on three interrelated areas: research (technology transfer and innovation), teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education), and a social engagement function in line with regional/national development. In this respect, the third mission cannot be considered as an isolated (or residual) function; rather, it is complementary to the other two missions of universities. On 19 March 2015, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion, *Engaged Universities Shaping Europe* (European Economic and Social Committee, 2015). In this document the Committee advocated explicitly for the first time for the concept of a civic university in EU policy documents. In May 2017, the European Commission (2017) adopted its *Communication (COM(2017) 247 final) on a Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education*, focusing on four priority activities: tackling future skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development, building inclusive and connected higher education systems, ensuring higher education institutions contribute to innovation, and supporting effective and efficient higher education systems.

This emphasis on third mission activities of higher education institutions should be accompanied by appropriate data and indicators to support the development of third mission activities. That is why attention to the third mission of the universities is given by academic discourse and by research. In 2015, a special edition of the *European Journal of Higher Education* was dedicated to the topic. The Council of Europe has in particular published a number of essays on the role of higher education in modern societies in the last 10 years. Among others, we can mention *Good*

Practices in University–Enterprise Partnership (Mora, Detmer, & Vieira, 2010), *Reimagining Democratic Societies: A New Era of Personal and Social Responsibility* (Bergan, Harkavy, & Land, 2013), and *Higher Education for Modern Societies: Competences and Values* (Bergan & Damian, 2010). All of these studies and documents point out the need for changing the role of universities as well as teaching and learning strategies targeted on competency-based learning.

Although the emphasis on the third mission of universities is laid out in a number of European documents and studies, in Slovak higher education this term is almost unknown. Matulayová (2013), based on an analysis of strategic materials relating to higher education institutions in Slovakia, stated that the notion of a third mission or third role of universities is not explicitly used in even one strategic document. There is also no mention of the issue of “new roles” or social responsibility of higher education institutions. There is, however, accentuated cooperation with industry and the private sphere. Cognition and knowledge are preferentially perceived as goods; education and research as services. The Slovak Republic has acceded to these approaches that emphasize the economic dimension of tertiary education. Academic capitalism manifests itself in all aspects of state policy on tertiary education and science and research—from organization and funding through quality and outcomes measurement to designing future development. The redefinition of the missions of universities was to highlight the National Education Development Program “Learning Slovakia” (Národný program výchovy a vzdelávania “Učiace sa Slovensko”) prepared in 2017, which defined the third mission of universities in a separate chapter (Burjan et al., 2017). However, the document did not come into force. The National Program for the Development of Education (Národný program výchovy a vzdelávania; Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu SR, 2018), approved in Slovakia in 2018, included the implementation of tools to support the implementation of the third mission of higher education institutions, but it gave no specifics for this measure.

Slovak higher education institutions, as well as civic engagement itself in this region, were influenced by socialism. The educational system was based on egalitarian principles, collective education, and strong

centralization. During socialism, the state had an absolute monopoly in education. There were only state schools, at a maximum level unified. The tradition of volunteer work and civic activism was forcibly interrupted in totalitarian regimes, and the operation of all forms of independent organizations was deliberately and systematically reduced or subjected to strict control. Civil society itself and voluntary engagement of citizens in resolving local problems were not supported, and universities did not play any role in the process. Any civic engagement was state-controlled, more compulsory than voluntary. The role of universities was seen primarily in research and education. This is why university teachers and leaders still do not understand well the social role of universities and the need for its development, and thus they are not prepared for its implementation in practice. Development of civic engagement is expected from organizations active in the nongovernmental sphere, not from higher education institutions, traditionally perceived as closed institutions with no relation to practice and real life.

The level of civic engagement in Slovakia still cannot compare to that reached in countries with a developed culture of engagement in resolving local problems. The latest research, from 2011, shows that only 27% of adults had participated in formal volunteering in the previous 12 months (Brozmanová Gregorová et al., 2012). This low rate of participation is due to the above-mentioned historical experience, as well as to other problems and needs identified in the analysis presented by European Volunteering Centre (2011), such as the need to actively motivate people to get involved in civic and voluntary activities; the need to educate about volunteering; and the need for education, training, and capacity building in the field of volunteering and civic engagement.

The role of higher education institutions in the development of communities and regions, in resolving local and global problems, and in actively contributing to the development of civic engagement and social responsibility of employees and students is not as easy for “traditional” higher education institutions as research and education. Many of them are still not open to cooperation with public and nongovernmental organizations in their region, and they do not have sufficient capacities developed to

participate in the resolution of local, regional, or national challenges and problems.

The lack of attention from universities in Slovakia to the third mission and strategies developed within this mission can also be attributed to the general attitude of society regarding the responsibility for solving problems in society and communities, as well as the specific meaning of solidarity in Slovakia. Solidarity in the context of practical community service carries a voluntary attribute, not only to indicate that a person participates in it of his or her own will but also to express a certain contradiction to compulsory solidarity. Historically, voluntary solidarity was the precursor to that of a compulsory nature, but the powerful social state during the period of communism and consequently to the social-democratic direction of governments after 1989 led to its weakening. Compulsory or forced solidarity and contributions to the social system began to be seen by people as fulfilling their obligations toward others in order to fulfill reciprocity and comradeship. This is evidenced by research findings on the perception of volunteering among people in Slovakia. For example, there is a strong belief in Slovakia that volunteers would not be needed if the state fulfilled its obligations. In 1998, this view was held by 55% of respondents (Woleková, 2002) and by 74% in 2003 (Bútorová, 2004). This view is upheld even by the younger generation.

In research conducted in 2017 (Brozmanová Gregorová, Šolcová, & Siekelová, 2018) among young people aged 15 to 30, up to 54% of respondents agreed with this view. As Bútorová (2004) states, this way of thinking is based on the idea that, under ideal conditions, the hand of the caregiving state should “reach out” to every situation in the life of the community, whether it is an emergency situation or development opportunities. People with such a statist approach do not perceive volunteering as an irreplaceable segment in the life of society. The growth of forced solidarity has, on the one hand, positive consequences in that the state guarantees the satisfaction of the basic needs of the population, which increases the sense of social security. On the other hand, it risks the loss of activity of individuals and the limitation of voluntary solidarity. Forced solidarity essentially blocks the possibility of expressing freedom of action for the benefit of someone else, because this role is undertaken by the state and leaves no room

for that freedom.

For these reasons, the terminology used in the field of civic engagement in the Slovak context is unstable and unclear, which also complicates research in this field. The most commonly used term in this area is the concept of volunteering, but this is also not perceived unequivocally by the general public. This is well illustrated by one of the publications on volunteering in Slovakia among the young people, titled *I Am Not a Volunteer! I Only Do It . . .* (Králíková, 2016). People often do not identify themselves with the position of a volunteer, even though they perform this activity on a regular and long-term basis. The terms *community service*, *community engagement*, and *service-learning* are not used in the Slovak language, and they do not have Slovak equivalents. After literal translation into Slovak, they are basically incomprehensible and unusable. Similarly, *community* is not a commonly used word for Slovaks.

In this context, not only the third mission of universities, but also service-learning is being developed as one of the ways of fulfilling this mission. As stated by Regina (2013), service-learning focuses on eliminating the gap between social engagement and academic life. At the same time, it helps build bridges between “serious scientists” and socially engaged universities, creating a synergy between the three missions of universities.

The literature in the field indicates several basic theoretical definitions of service-learning, as well as numerous paradigms and perspectives in which this strategy is viewed (see Butin, 2010; Moore & Lan, 2009). In the last 20 years, more than 200 new definitions of service-learning have been published, in which service-learning is understood as an experience, a pedagogical concept, a philosophical concept, a social movement, and so on.

Service-learning is often known in the literature as a pedagogy that combines a service to the community with learning opportunities offered to the involved students (Heffernan, 2001). Service-learning is generally described as a “balanced approach to experiential education” that can “ensure equal focus on both the service provided to the community and the learning that is occurring” (Furco, 1996, p. 3). In other words, service-learning is perceived as a method by which students can learn

and develop social and professional competencies through active participation in community-oriented experiences that are connected to their academic curricula and provide them with reflective opportunities (Furco, 1996). From this strategic application, we expect not only the development of professional competencies but also changes in the students' "civic characteristics," which determine a citizens' involvement not only during but also after performing service-learning projects.

Nowadays, international consensus defines service-learning through three key characteristics: (1) a focus on efficiently and effectively addressing needs *with* a community, and not just *for* the community; (2) active student involvement in all stages, from planning to assessment; and (3) being intentionally linked to learning content (curricular learning, reflection, development of skills for citizenship and work, and research; Regina, 2017). Service-learning works with real student experiences and involves metacognitive learning when the student is aware of how they have learned, what they have learned, what helped them learn, how they can use it in practice, and what they need to learn further. It is understood as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with education and reflection. The community service is incorporated into the curriculum of various academic subjects and study programs. There are several service-learning models in practice.

When operating with a service-learning concept in a higher education system, it is suggested that a distinction has to be made between community service, volunteerism, field education, and service-learning (Fiske, 2001; Furco & Holland, 2005; Lipčáková & Matulayová, 2012). Thus, service-learning distinguishes itself from other types of community-oriented activities by connecting with curriculum content, enriching the learning process by promoting a better understanding of course and disciplinary content, promoting civic responsibility of students, and strengthening communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Fiske, 2001; Rusu, Bencic, & Hodor, 2014).

Thanks to instrumental and innovative service-learning focusing on the social and professional development of students as well as community needs, we are currently experiencing the development of service-learning programs at universities around

the world. In Slovakia, service-learning for the academic public and educational practice is a new and still almost unknown pedagogical strategy. In recent years, this strategy has been spreading, especially from one of the Slovak universities—Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica—not only within its internal environment but also in a wider context.

The specificity of service-learning development in Slovak conditions is its connection with education for volunteering and civic engagement. In April 2018, the Strategy for Education of Children and Youth for Volunteering in Slovakia (Konceptcia výchovy a vzdelávania detí a mládeže k dobrovoľníctvu; 2018) was adopted by the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport.

The Strategy is based on strategic and conceptual documents prepared at the national level, research findings in the field of youth volunteering, and the current practice in this field. The Youth Strategy 2014–2020 in Slovakia (Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu SR, 2014) pays attention to the development of youth volunteering. One of the measures defined in this Strategy is to connect volunteering to formal education. The Support Program for Volunteering and Volunteer Centers (Úrad splnomocnenca vlády pre rozvoj občianskej spoločnosti, 2013), based on the Government of the Slovak Republic Resolution No. 68/2012, Point C.15. and approved by the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations through Resolution No. 22/2013, emphasizes and justifies the significance of volunteering, the urgency of supporting it, and the need to educate volunteers within the concept of lifelong learning. In harmony with the proposed measures of the program, there was a task incorporated into the Action Plan for the Strategy of the Civil Society Development for the years 2017 and 2018: preparing the Strategy for Education of Children and Youth for Volunteering. This strategy views volunteering as a cross-sectional theme and a space for experiential learning based on the reflection of experience, and thus promulgates the view that children and young people should be led by pedagogues toward active participation, a proactive approach in solving societal problems, helping others through volunteer activities, but also toward inclusive behaviors and prosocial attitudes and values.

Volunteering in the school environment is developed in Slovakia within several models. Several organizations in Slovakia based their recruitment of volunteers on specific schools or universities and organizing volunteer programs for them. Schools are usually inclined toward such cooperation; however, volunteering is in such a case perceived as an extracurricular activity and part of informal education. At primary and secondary schools and universities, we also often encounter active teachers who inspire children and young people to engage in voluntary activities and organize these activities—they actively search for volunteering opportunities for their students or plan such activities together with pupils and students. Volunteering in the school environment is also supported by several nongovernmental organizations within their programs, such as the Institute for Active Citizenship, the Green Foundation, some regional volunteer centers, and the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation. However, in schools the good intention of becoming an active part of the community often leads to literally forcing students into volunteering without their free choice, which for some students can result in a negative attitude toward volunteering as such. Connecting volunteer experience with the educational process and reflection of this experience by students is usually a very rare practice, so many volunteering activities of students remain “only” an experience without explicitly specified educational goals.

The Strategy for Education of Children and Youth for Volunteering in Slovakia is based on service-learning pedagogy principles, and its goal is to create the prerequisites for the implementation of education for volunteering at all levels of education (also at universities). The strategy and its introduction into practice should help volunteering become a natural part of lifestyles of people and communities in Slovakia, and thus connect formal education with real life. According to this strategy, volunteering should also fulfill these objectives:

- developing the perception and sensitivity of children and youth toward the needs and problems of the environment and the people around them or wider community in which they live;
- leading children and youth toward coresponsibility for what is hap-

pening in their surroundings and to develop their self-confidence so they can become the change-makers in the society; and

- promoting the interconnection of volunteering and competencies gained through it with the personal and future professional lives of children and youth.

Implementing the strategy into practice will also require empirical verification of the fulfillment of its objectives, so research on the impact on students of service-learning adapted to Slovak conditions is highly topical. Verifying the impact of service-learning on university students is a first step toward laying the groundwork for research in this area in a national context and is being implemented as part of “The Influence of Service Learning—Innovative Strategy for Education—on Social and Personal Development and Citizen Involvement of University Students” supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Service-Learning at Matej Bel University

At Matej Bel University (MBU) service-learning has been applied since the 2005–2006 academic year, and it can be stated that MBU is the leader in this field in Slovakia—conducting research, using grants, and publishing both at home and abroad. Elsewhere in Slovakia, only the Prešov University in Prešov devotes any time to service-learning, and then only in the education of social workers; the Catholic University of Ružomberok is, at present, only in the initial phases of its introduction. There are also several elementary and secondary schools conducting service-learning pilot projects (many in cooperation with the Volunteer Center in Banská Bystrica and MBU).

MBU has been working on the development of voluntary student activities since 1998, particularly in cooperation with the regional Volunteer Center in Banská Bystrica. The students were involved in organizing numerous volunteer activities for community and nonprofit organizations. MBU has been providing service-learning since 2005. It was implemented by one teacher (nowadays coordinator of service-learning at MBU) within the subject Third Sector

and Nonprofit Organizations in the education of future social workers. Since 2013, the project Development of Innovative Forms of Education at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica has been instrumental in the qualitative and quantitative development of service-learning at MBU. Based on the assessment of students' needs, we have applied service-learning since the academic year 2013–2014 to a two-semester optional university subject, Service Learning 1 and Service Learning 2, led by an interdisciplinary team of 10 teachers from different departments. In 2016, MBU entered the international program directed by Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario [Latin American Center for Service-Learning] (CLAYSS) supporting the development of service-learning at universities. More than 30 teachers from MBU were educated on the implementation of service-learning through online and offline courses offered by CLAYSS. At the same time, a platform for an exchange of information and experience in the field was created.

Service-learning was officially confirmed by the rector of the university as a way a university can meet its third mission. One of the principles and values of MBU is “MBU is engaged in the development of communities and the region, in solving local and national problems and it actively contributes to development of a civil society” (Univerzita Mateja Bela, 2015, p. 4). This principle was incorporated in the strategic documents of MBU in 2017, mainly thanks to the activities regarding development of service-learning strategy. Each year there is also a concrete task regarding service-learning development in the plan for the university and faculties. MBU understands service-learning as the key route to fulfilling its third mission. Service-learning at Matej Bel University is defined as an active teaching and learning strategy based on service for others in an effort to develop students' personalities, key competencies, and sense of civic responsibility and engagement. It emphasizes that it is the conjunction of the needs of students, the community, and the organization (school).

Service-learning development at MBU is a bottom-up process. The main role in practical development is played by the core service-learning team. Nowadays the core team consists of 12 teachers. The teachers share different responsibilities and tasks

(mentoring for new teachers who want to implement service-learning, organizing roundtables and workshops, delivering training for teachers, service-learning promotion, conducting research). The team coordinator is also coordinator of service-learning at MBU, but it is an unofficial position. She promotes, with strong team support, service-learning outside and inside the university and coordinates projects in this field. In the academic year 2018–2019, more than 15 subjects at MBU included service-learning pedagogy, and 17 teachers were involved in the implementation. The subjects are part of different study programs in different faculties, mainly social work, pedagogy, social pedagogy, teacher education in different areas, and economics. Since 2013, more than 400 students have participated in service-learning projects in cooperation with different community partners (schools, community centers, municipalities, nongovernmental organizations, houses for social services, community foundations, and others). There is no administrative or support staff at the department, faculty, or university level helping teachers with administrative issues. The involvement of teachers is not part of their responsibilities; they do not have any special benefits from it or financial motivation. The involvement in service-learning or any community activity is not part of the teachers' regular evaluation. In 2018, the fund for supporting students' service-learning projects was established at MBU. For the first time, students have the opportunity to obtain support for their project implementation from university sources. The implementation of the university's third mission and service-learning in the university curriculum is an important structural issue. We have managed to complete the first steps in the process. The biggest challenge is not so much the formal change but the mental change, which is a long-term and challenging process.

As evidenced from the above-mentioned definition of service-learning, an integral and essential part of service-learning is service in the community. Therefore, from this strategy application in the process of education we expect not only the development of professional and key or transversal competencies but also changes in social and personal responsibility. That is to say, this attitude significantly determines actual citizens' involvement not only during but also after the performance of service-learning

projects. Citizenship is described as bringing with it not only democratic rights but also a responsibility to help solve problems in the community through active participation in community matters. Service-learning offers students the opportunity to recognize the role they can play as responsible citizens while they are students and also after they have completed their studies, by bringing their future career to the community to help solve problems or add value (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Civic Outcomes and Service-Learning

A long research tradition of the effectiveness and the design of service-learning can be observed in the United States. We list here some of the most significant contributions to research abroad: Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000); Billig (2000); Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki (2011); Clayton, Bringle, and Hatcher (2013); Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001); Melchior et al. (1999); Morgan and Streb (2001); Reed, Jernstedt, Hawley, Reber, and DuBois (2005); Simons and Cleary (2006); Yorio and Ye (2012). These works are aimed at the analysis of the impact of service-learning on students and suggest that service-learning has a positive effect in several areas. Empirical findings not only demonstrated the positive contribution to the development of personal skills and learning success, but also illustrated the potential for the development of civic outcomes (Furco, 2004). As stated by Hemer & Reason (2017), the study of civic outcomes is not a high-consensus field; rather, it is informed by multiple academic disciplines and theoretical perspectives. Hemer and Reason offer a review of studies on a broad conceptualization of civic outcomes, including (a) civic knowledge, (b) skills, (c) attitudes and values, (d) behaviors, and (e) civic identity, which is a broader outcome inclusive of the previous four. Civic outcomes in these areas are presented in several studies, for example Astin et al. (2000); Bender and Jordaan (2007); Bowman (2011); Bringle, Clayton, and Bringle (2015); Coe et al. (2015); Hatcher (2011); Keen (2009); Kim and Billig (2003); Klute, Sandel, and Billig (2002); Mayhew and Engberg (2011); Prentice and Robinson (2010); Shiarella, McCarthy, and Tucker (2000); Torney-Purta, Cabrera, Roohr, Liu, and Rios (2015). Besides the quantitative outcomes, one of the most important qualitative outcomes of service-learning programs reported in the

literature is the students' feeling that their actions can make a significant difference to the community (Simons & Cleary, 2006) and the perceived sense of their own actions (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Eyler and Giles (2001) reviewed more than 40 studies reporting positive effects of service-learning on students' sense of social responsibility, citizenship skills, or commitment to service. More recently, Buch (2008) found that students who participated in service projects as part of a discipline-centered learning community had significantly higher scores on the Civic Action Scale (Moely et al., 2002) than a comparison group of students not in the learning community. Using the same scale, another study reported positive changes in civic action scores among students participating in a semester-long service-learning project (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002). Kilgo, Pasquesi, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella (2014) demonstrated that service-learning is a possible mechanism to encourage social responsibility.

Reason and Hemer (2015), based on a review of research studies focused on civic outcomes, found that the vast majority of researchers' inquiries into civic outcomes used quantitative methods, often based on students' self-report instruments and cross-sectional designs. For measuring civic attitudes, different tools were also developed, for example the Community Service Attitude Scale (CSAS) developed by Shiarella et al. (2000), the Civic Action Scale (CAS) developed by Moely et al. (2002), the Civic Engagement Scale developed by Doolittle, and Faul (2013), or Mabry's (1998) scale for measuring the outcomes of service-learning including also civic attitudes. Steinberg, Hatcher, and Bringle (2011) offered in their work the basis for assessment and research on civic outcomes of service-learning based on the concept of the civic-minded graduate (CMG). They provide a model (CMG Scale, CMG Narrative Prompt, CMG Rubric, CMG Interview protocol) for approaching civic development on a different level of analysis and across time.

We agree with Gerholz, Liszt, and Klingsieck (2017) that the results of these studies are not directly transferable to different and heterogeneous European contexts (e.g., learning and teaching tradition, understanding of society and civic engagement). As stated by Gerholz et al. (2018), the results of a mixed-method study in the European

area revealed positive time effects on the development of civic attitudes based on the understanding of Mabry's scale. In addition, the results of these empirical analyses are limited, particularly regarding the implementation of service-learning. The methodological level shows the different operationalization of the constructs examined, which is substantiated in the absence of a standardized competency model.

Furthermore, no study of this kind has as yet been performed specifically for and among Slovak higher education institutions and students. There are research studies from Matej Bel University, where service-learning has been developed since 2005 and where an interdisciplinary team is focusing also on measuring the impact of service-learning on key competencies and civic engagement of students. In several studies we approved, service-learning had a positive effect on the development of a subjective perceived level of key competencies and social and personal responsibility (for example, Bariaková & Kubealaková, 2016; Brozmanová Gregorová & Heinzová, 2015; Brozmanová Gregorová, Heinzová, & Chovancová, 2016; Brozmanová Gregorová, Heinzová, Kurčíková, Šavrnochová, & Šolcová, 2019).

The benefits of service-learning in the education of social workers at Prešov University have been reported in several studies (Balogová, Skyba, & Šoltésová, 2014; Lipčáková & Matulayová, 2012; Skyba & Šoltésová, 2013). In the Czech environment, service-learning is used in university education, primarily in the preparation of social workers, at the University of Olomouc. Matulayová (2013, 2014) pointed out the benefits of its application in education in social work. In these cases, these are simple studies based on analyzing reflections of students who have completed subjects that are not focused on civic outcomes.

Neither in the Slovak environment nor in the Czech environment, which is very close to Slovakia, can we say there is any appreciable attention paid to the topic of community service, based on a systematic review of literature. This fact is caused by the above-mentioned context of service-learning development in Slovakia. Service-learning is becoming more integrated into higher education practice, as well as in lower levels of education. There is a need to conduct studies on the impact it has on students. Universities have programs where

academics see potential positive outcomes for students, but these outcomes cannot be verified with existing methods and instruments.

Methods

In our research, our goal was to verify the impact of service-learning on the social and personal responsibility of students.

Participants

The respondents for our research were students at MBU who completed a service-learning course during a period of three academic years, namely 2015–2016 to 2017–2018, and who formed an experimental group of 75 students. In addition to the experimental group, we selected a control group that was experimentally matched by study field, degree course level, and gender. The control group consisted of 32 students. Respondents of both groups surveyed gave their consent to anonymous processing of the data they provided to us by completing pencil-and-paper questionnaires that were administered approximately seven months apart. There is no institutional review of human subject research approval needed in Slovakia; the research was carried out within the research project supported by the Ministry of Education, Research, Science and Sport of the Slovak Republic, and before approval, the project was reviewed by experts outside the university. Submission of the project was reviewed and signed also by the head of the Faculty of Education at MBU.

Stimuli

The research findings presented in this article relate to a study of students at Matej Bel University who completed a specific course based on service-learning. At the university, there is an optional two-semester course open to students of all levels and in all study programs. The course has been led since 2013 by an interdisciplinary team of teachers from different departments, with the aim of developing the students' competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes) related to delivering activities for the benefit of others and project management.

The first part of the course is implemented in several teaching blocks. Students acquire theoretical knowledge through creative and active teaching methods. Practical analysis helps them to gain experience in group

dynamics and team roles. They learn about careful planning and time management, explore the necessity of aligning objectives with a target group through the choice of an adapted tool to ensure an efficient promotion of their service-learning project within the target group, practice communication in model situations, and acquire skills for drafting budgets. Reflection precedes self-evaluation and evaluation of each activity. The second part of the course transfers service activities to the students, who, no later than the end of the summer semester of the academic year, identify their own needs and the needs of the school and community within their group, and then create activities to meet the identified needs. They continue to cooperate with their teachers through mentoring. At least twice a month, the activity is assessed by the student and his or her tutor, from various points of view including planning, implementation, and evaluation. At the end of the summer semester, all students meet and present their implemented activities and their outputs, reflect on their own learning process, and provide an evaluation of the whole course to the other students and to the public. The evaluation session is an integral part of the service-learning course and takes place at the university as a seminar open to all students and teachers of the university.

Procedures

As there is no tool for measuring social and personal responsibility in Slovak terms, we have adopted Conrad and Hedin's (1981) Social and Personal Responsibility Scale (SPRS) to assess the impact of the service-learning on the development of these characteristics of students. While verifying changes in social and personal responsibility, we also experimentally verified this range and its use in our conditions.

The SPRS is divided into five subscales:

1. The *Social Welfare subscale* focuses on the extent to which one feels concerned about problems and issues in a wider society.
2. The *Duty subscale* focuses on the extent to which one feels bound to personally meet one's social obligations.
3. The *Competency to Take Responsibility subscale* reflects that although a person may have a positive attitude toward others, they may still not be able to act

in a responsible manner if they do not have the competence or skill to do so.

4. The *Efficacy Regarding Responsibility subscale* reflects that a person must be willing or be able to believe that taking responsible action will have an impact on the social or physical environment.
5. The *Performance of Responsible Acts subscale* assesses the extent to which students perceive that they do in fact act in responsible ways. (Conrad & Hedin, 1981)

The original scale was designed for secondary school students. We used the scale as adapted by Brozmanová Gregorová (2007) for university students in research focused on volunteering in higher education in Matej Bel University. The authors of the survey tried to forestall students' tendency to give socially desirable responses by making a special type of scale where the respondents do not assess themselves but their peers. Each SPRS item consists of two statements concerning social and personal responsibility. The respondent should choose only one statement and assess whether it is "always true" or "sometimes true." In total, there is a four-level scale for each item of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 21 items (42 statements) divided into five subscales and involves 11 reversible items. Two items of the questionnaire are not evaluated at all. The scale has been translated into Slovak. The data were analyzed using SPSS 19.0.

Within the qualitative strategy we applied content analysis. We analyzed the self-reflections of the students who completed the course with service-learning strategy and completed the measuring tool SPRS in 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 ($N = 34$). The students elaborated written self-reflections after completion of the course and at the same time they filled in the questionnaires. The self-reflections were structured according to questions focused on the benefits from service-learning experiences. The students were informed that their self-reflections would be used for research purposes.

Results

In Table 1 we present the results of the data reliability survey using Cronbach's alpha, and in Table 2 the descriptive indicators of our research sample ($N = 107$), especially for experimental and control group.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha for Pre- and Posttesting Using the Social and Personal Responsibility Scale

	Pretesting	Posttesting
Attitudes toward being responsible: Social Welfare	0.271	0.637
Attitudes toward being responsible: Duty	0.146	0.758
Competency to Take Responsibility	0.337	0.351
Efficacy Regarding Responsibility	0.537	0.597
Performance of Responsible Acts	0.461	0.572

Table 2. Descriptive Indicators Social and Personal Responsibility Scale in Experimental (N = 75) and Control Group (N = 32) From Posttesting

		Median	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Experimental group (N = 75)	Social Welfare	3	3.083	0.560	-0.394	-0.355
	Duty	3.5	3.308	0.491	-0.106	-1.052
	Competency to Take Responsibility	2.5	2.703	0.547	-0.534	1.259
	Efficacy Regarding Responsibility	2.5	2.688	0.528	-0.169	0.457
	Performance of Responsible Acts	3	3.070	0.585	-0.237	-0.580
	Global Responsibility	3	2.984	0.351	-0.139	-0.775
Control group (N = 32)	Social Welfare	2.5	2.728	0.711	-0.770	0.671
	Duty	3	2.930	0.786	-1.131	1.089
	Competency to Take Responsibility	2.5	2.637	0.601	0.149	0.192
	Efficacy Regarding Responsibility	2.5	2.633	0.535	-0.309	-0.605
	Performance of Responsible Acts	2.5	2.728	0.703	-0.410	-0.177
	Global Responsibility	2.5	2.735	0.522	-0.486	0.501

The reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated by using Cronbach's alpha and varied from 0.146 to 0.537 for pretesting and 0.351 to 0.758 for posttesting. We attribute the low level of data reliability to the unusual form of questionnaire administration, when we had to allocate approximately 15% of improperly administered questionnaires from the questionnaires to the research sample, especially in pretesting. Therefore, we will only consider posttesting data for our research needs.

In several subscales of the questionnaire, experimental group students assessed their

social and personal responsibilities at higher levels than did the control group students. The data in Table 1 did not show normal distribution; therefore, we used nonparametric testing in our research (Spearman correlation test and Mann-Whitney U test).

Results About Changes in Personal and Social Responsibility—Quantitative Approach

In our research, we tried to find out whether there was a change in the level of personal and social responsibility measured by SPRS. We compared the results of the posttests

Table 3. Difference in the Posttest SPRS Between the Experimental and Control Group

	Group	Median	U	P-value	CLES
Social Welfare	Exper	3	850	0.016	0.292
	Cont	2.5			
Duty	Exper	3.5	884	0.030	0.263
	Cont	3			
Competency to Take Responsibility	Exper	2.5	1087.5	0.435	—
	Cont	2.5			
Efficacy Regarding Responsibility	Exper	2.5	1148	0.720	—
	Cont	2.5			
Performance of Responsible Acts	Exper	3	872.5	0.025	0.273
	Cont	2.5			
Global Responsibility	Exper	3	858.5	0.020	0.285
	Cont	2.5			

between the experimental and control groups (Table 3). Posttest data reliability, as we mentioned before, was acceptable. We tested the differences in personal and social responsibility between experimental and control groups through the Mann–Whitney test.

The statistically significant difference in posttests between the experimental and the control group was demonstrated in the Social Welfare, Duty, Performance of Responsible Acts, and Global Responsibility scales. Common language effect size shows weak relations. All differences are in favor of the experimental group.

Results About Changes in Attitude to Community Service—Qualitative Approach

Based on the qualitative analyses from the students' self-reflection, we can identify concrete benefits connected with the changes in social and personal responsibility and attitudes toward community service. As shown in Table 4, we organized identified benefits according to the model of altruistic behavior described by Schwartz (1977). According to Schwartz, altruistic helping behavior describes how aware individuals are of the needs of others and to what degree they want to help others. This model corresponds also with the social and personal responsibility concept measured by SPRS. The Schwartz model identifies the sequential steps represented by the identi-

fied categories in our qualitative analysis.

Discussion

In our research, which focused on the impact of service-learning on social and personal responsibility of students, we faced a number of methodological facts. On the one hand, we were forced to adopt a foreign methodology for investigating this phenomenon, and on the other hand, it was specific in the administration of the questionnaire. This fact—the slight incomprehensibility of its administration—was reflected in the respondents by a relatively high error rate and, ultimately, by low reliability of data during its first administration. We attribute the low level of data reliability to the unusual form of questionnaire administration, when we had to allocate approximately 15% of improperly administered questionnaires from questionnaires to the research sample, especially in pretesting. The authors of the questionnaire tried to avoid social desirability responses when constructing it, but it is clear that the questionnaire form is difficult for Slovak conditions and that respondents found the items incomprehensible and thus sometimes answered at random. Regarding posttesting reliability, it probably increased because the respondents had previously encountered this scale. Since the higher values of Cronbach's alpha occurred in posttests, we can say that the experience of working in the community is

Table 4. Identified Benefits of Service-Learning Experience in Area of Civic Attitudes (adapted from Schwartz, 1977)

Community service attitude	Student Reflection Statements
Activation steps: Perception of a need to respond (Social Welfare subscale)	
Awareness that others are in need	<p><i>"I have better knowledge about the needs and problems in society."</i></p> <p><i>"I gained knowledge about the community and the needs in the community."</i></p> <p><i>"I became aware that there are many people who need help."</i></p>
Perception that there are actions that could relieve the need	<p><i>"Because of the subject, I know that there are people and groups that deal with others and I can be part of them."</i></p>
Recognition of one's own ability to do something to provide help	<p><i>"I learnt to respond actively and flexibly to the developing needs in the community."</i></p> <p><i>"I know what it is to help other people, and that I am able to do it."</i></p> <p><i>"I can actively respond to the needs of others."</i></p> <p><i>"I will know when helping the community how to better judge my possibilities."</i></p>
Feeling a sense of responsibility to become involved based on a sense of connectedness with the community or the people in need	<p><i>"I realized how important it is to help other people and that it is part of my task."</i></p> <p><i>"It was important for me to know that I can be helpful."</i></p>
Obligation step: Moral obligation to respond (Duty subscale)	
Feeling a moral obligation to help that is generated through (a) personal or situational norms to help and (b) empathy	<p><i>"I don't see only myself but also the needs of other people . . ."</i></p> <p><i>"I learned how important it is to see problems from the viewpoint of those who need help, which is also necessary in one's work."</i></p>
Defense steps: Reassessment of potential responses (Competency to Take Responsibility subscale and Efficacy Regarding Responsibility subscale)	
Assessment of (a) costs and (b) probable outcomes (benefits) of helping	<p><i>"I found that helping other people can have more benefits for myself than I realized before this experience."</i></p>
Reassessment and redefinition of the situation by denial of the reality and seriousness of the need and the responsibility to respond	<p><i>"It is nice to be creative and come up with new ideas, but I see that in community service it is more important to also see if our activities are needed by somebody in the community."</i></p> <p><i>"Thanks to graduating in my subject, I have become aware of a number of initiatives and ideas that I have begun to implement."</i></p> <p><i>"I realized how important and necessary it is to help others."</i></p>
Response step: Engage in helping behavior (Performance of Responsible Acts subscale)	
Intention to engage in community service	<p><i>"I want to be more engaged in solving the real issues in society and the community and I want to also motivate other people to become involved in community service in the future."</i></p> <p><i>"I will engage more actively in various activities that are beneficial to the community."</i></p>

important for comprehension of the questions, as it evidently led to more consistent answers. Likewise, we suspect that some of the statements are confusing for people who have no experience with civic engagement and have no plans to practice it (after the service-learning experience, the reliability of the subscale was higher).

On the basis of testing differences in social and personal responsibility after completing service-learning, we can say that there is a statistically significant weakness between these groups, especially in *attitudes on social welfare, attitudes on duty, and performance of responsible acts*. The results of reliability testing, however, point to the low realism of the research tool and data. We realize that our research is only a pilot in view of the size of our sample in the experimental and control groups, but despite the experience of processing data from SPRS, we see that it is necessary for us to produce our own scale for the verification of social and personal responsibility.

On the other hand, the results of qualitative analysis point to the fact that the benefits of service-learning can be identified from an individual perspective also in the area of civic outcomes. The results of our study show that there may be considerable differences between students as individuals regarding changes in their civic attitudes. The important role is played not only by the individual characteristics of the students themselves, but also by the service-learning experience itself. In some projects, students have a close connection to the community, whereas in others it is not so strong. Students also spent varying amounts of time in community service during the service-learning experience.

As Gerholz et al. (2018) stated, the empirical results indicate that a general effect of service-learning can be assumed, even if only minor effects are evident and the results of the studies are mixed. The capacity of the results at the contextual level is limited, as nearly all the studies come from the United States, where a more community-oriented education goal is traditionally prevalent.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study had a small sample size in both the experimental and the control groups of participants, and used measuring tools. For future research, we recommend increasing the sample size. The possibili-

ties of increasing the sample size in Slovak conditions are strongly related to the future development of service-learning at MBU as well as in other Slovak universities. In addition, it would be beneficial to repeat the posttest after a longer time period to measure the long-term impact and outcomes of the experience.

Also, data collection methods must be tailored to the specific conditions of development of service-learning in Slovakia. After verifying the research tools we transferred, we have prepared a new research tool for the measurement of personal and social responsibility for the academic year 2018–2019. We have included items where we have found higher reliability for repeated measurements. It also appears that a suitable approach to identifying the benefits of service-learning is a combination of research methods and approaches that can reveal the different perspectives of the phenomenon under consideration, in our case the benefits of service-learning in the civic area. We also agree with Battistoni (2013), who states that beyond greater precision of the conceptual framework, there are three areas in particular that should drive the research agenda in assessing students' civic learning outcomes: (a) more and better longitudinal and qualitative research, (b) understanding of the role and importance of educators in students' civic learning, and (c) comparison of the impact of different service-learning models on students' civic learning.

Conclusions

Despite the above-mentioned findings and weak points of our study in itself and in relation to the findings of other researchers doing similar research, we can conclude that service-learning belongs to those educational strategies that help develop a personal and social responsibility and positive attitudes of students toward community service.

Research on service-learning in Slovakia is also still at an early stage, and little subject-specific research has been conducted. It is therefore believed that the current study has filled a gap in the existing research, as it was the first study of its kind and will probably lead to further studies on attitudes toward and perceptions of community service-learning, and its integration into the curriculum.

From this study we learned how important it is to use measuring tools that respect the context of service-learning development and test them to prove the validity of obtained data. It is also important to conduct more in-depth qualitative analysis, which could provide important contextual understandings of the terms that are used in research in this field.

Research on the benefits of service-learning is one of the important factors in the development of this strategy under Slovak

conditions. The challenge for development in the field of service-learning is the newly adopted *strategy for education of children and youth for volunteering*, which is based on service-learning pedagogy principles and which also includes higher education institutions. We also see the research on service-learning in Slovak conditions as a way to prove its benefits and advocate for its implementation in practice.



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