Service-Learning concept and its implementation with business (private sector)

For decades, service-learning has become popular in higher education institutions (Carrington, 2011). Rooted in experiential education, service-learning is widely advocated as a pedagogy primarily for civic and citizen responsibilities. It is a pedagogical approach that bridges the existed gap between universities and society, thus allowing students intellectual, moral, and civic growth (Sandaran, 2012). In a broader sense, it involves non-profit organisations, nations, social initiatives, public institutions, etc., and aims to engage students in real-world problem solving, learning from experience, and taking time for structured and critical reflection (Resch and Knapp, 2020). Service-learning does not focus only on students' development but on the community needs as well.

Since its conceptualisation, the service-learning endeavour has evolved. Business education and related disciplines have recently been involved in the academic service-learning approach (Klink and Athaide, 2004). The rationale for implementing a service-learning approach with businesses stems from academics' difficulties in producing graduates that meet employers' expectations (Black, 2002). With a high unemployment rate, graduates struggle to find a job (Mtawa et al.,2019) whilst, employers perceive graduates often lack employability skills (Pena, 2020), in addition to employers seeking to hire an experienced workforce (Mtawa et al.,2020). Employability skills development is challenging with traditional curricula (Pena, 2020) and universities are required to shorten the gap allowing graduates easily secure employment (Mtawa et al.,2019). Since service-learning provides an opportunity for students to enhance their skills, research (e.g. Easterling and Ruddell, 1997) views its implementation with businesses well suited for graduates' employability. According to Black (2002), businesses finally found crucial their participation in community activities.

Implementing service-learning pedagogy with the business community allows students to be prepared for the future business world (Hoyt and Thalmann, 2001) either as employees or job creators and entrepreneurs. By doing so, students understand the functioning of businesses and develop their skills in addressing specific business-related issues (Black, 2002). Service-learning with businesses enhances students' soft skills development and helps them gain a competitive advantage in the workplace (Deepa and Seth, 2013).

In the context of globalization and the complexity of the 21st century, universities must prioritize teaching and learning approaches such as service-learning to provide graduates with the relevant employability skills required by prospective employers (Tumuti et al.,2013; Mtawa et al., 2019).

For additional information on the topic, consult the following references

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