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Relationship between Service-Learning and Civic Responsibility in Vocational Education Context

Abstract

Civic responsibility is an important element of democratic and social participation. The existing studies on service-learning have examined civic responsibility as a single construct which further delimits its theoretical applications. However, civic responsibility is a multidimensional construct. This study examines the relationship of service-learning with civic responsibility as a multidimensional construct having four dimensions: civic skills, civic knowledge, civic values and civic commitment. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from 395 students from vocational training institutes of Pakistan. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling through AMOS version 21. The results showed a positive relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility of students and all its four aspects. Based on the results, it is concluded that service-learning has improved civic responsibility of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. It is suggested that future studies should further test the results of this study in other cultural contexts.

Keywords: service-learning, civic responsibility, vocational training institutes

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is a credit bearing, course based educational experience in which students take part in an organized way to meet identified service needs, reflect on service activity that enhances sense of collaboration (teamwork) and civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). According to American Association of Community Colleges, service-learning is an association of community service with classroom instruction to develop students' critical thinking, reflective thinking, personal development and civic responsibility (Garcia & Robinson, 2005). The National Service Learning Clearinghouse while referring to "The Learn and Serve America" defines service-learning as a teaching and learning strategy incorporates community service with instruction and reflection for enriching the learning experience, teaching civic responsibility and strengthening communities (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2008). In any democratic society the aim of education is to prepare young people for their future roles as responsible, contributing and active citizens (Annette, 2008; Dean, 2007; Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). However, training individuals for citizenship is a complicated and multifaceted process. It requires developing certain knowledge, skills and dispositions to participate in the democratic process of any society (Haste & Hogan, 2006; Janmaat, 2011; Lin, 2013). To achieve this goal, researchers have suggested for such a pedagogy that combines academic and educational experience by creating collaboration between school, community and work (Deeley, 2010). Over the last three decades service-learning has been found to effectively achieve this goal (Eyler *et al.*, 1999; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Robinder, 2012). Scholars have also consistently advocated that service-learning develops students' leadership, teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills (Furco & Root, 2010; Kenny, 2002; Lane, 2008; O'Keefe & Feinberg, 2014). Service-Learning is a civic pedagogy. It effectively ensures collaborative and civic skills development of students (Robinder, 2012). One of the unique characteristics of service-learning is its reciprocal nature and its ability to connect academic course content with community service. For example, as an academic strategy, service-learning helps students better conceptualize course content and realize about their roles in the society as a citizen. Therefore, it has been identified as an effective teaching strategy to

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achieve the goal of civic development (Prentice, 2007, 2011; Prentice & Robinson, 2010). Service-learning is an experiential teaching method. It empowers students with practical, meaningful and learning experiences and builds their capacities to become more active citizens by increasing their knowledge, skills and commitment to better serve a rapidly increasing complex society (Annette, 2004; Felten & Clayton, 2011).

Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility is one of the important outcomes of service-learning and is a multidimensional concept (Berman, 1990). The concept of civic responsibility is understood in different ways (Teranishi, 2007). It includes developing students academic abilities such as communication skills, civic skills and attitude along with focus on communities and their general good (Battistoni, 1997). Fundamentally, civic responsibility consists of civic skills and civic commitment to serve the community (Jacoby & Ehrlich, 2009; Keen & Hall, 2009). However, more specifically civic responsibility has been categorized into different sub-categories such as civic values, civic knowledge, civic skills and civic commitment (Eyler & Giles, 1999a). In this study, the concept of civic responsibility is understood by measuring these aspects. Jacoby (2009) has indicated the following main elements of civic responsibility such as problem-solving, commitment to volunteerism, exploration of values and effective communication. Others have reported that the elements of values, knowledge, skills, efficacy and commitment are included within the concept of responsible citizenship (Eyler & Giles Jr, 2002).

Civic responsibility is defined as active participation in community life in an informed, committed and constructive manner and work for common welfare (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2002). There could be many ways to develop responsible citizenship but service-learning has been identified as one of the important approaches to promote active citizenship (Simons & Cleary, 2005). For better understanding, Eyler and Giles (1999) have categorized civic responsibility into the following broad categories: values, knowledge, skills and commitment. For the purpose of this study, these categories clarify and define the term civic responsibility. The concept of civic responsibility is understood in different ways. Some view it as participation in direct community service, democratic process or in public policy making (Keen & Hall, 2009). Some say that it is showing feelings of care, concerns and responsibility for community and national affairs concerned with people, institutions and ideals (Waterman, 1997). It is demonstration of responsibility in individual and collective actions for identifying and addressing public and community issues (Keene & Hall, 2009). Some writers explain that civic responsibility is demonstration of civic skills such as problem-solving, show commitment to volunteer service, explore personal values and effective communication (Jacoby, 2009). In view of some, civic responsibility is the intention of students to participate in a community service (Eyler & Giles Jr, 1999). Some writers describe that civic responsibility is the level of students' involvement in the community service (Gallini & Moely, 2003).

Civic Values

Civic responsibility has been frequently reported outcome of service-learning. For example, research has found that service-learning increases students' commitment to civic participation. Students value their participation in service activity. They believe that they contributed towards larger development of the people. This increases their sense of association with people in the community (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A study comparing 1,000 high school students participating in service-learning programmes found that students engaged in civic action scored higher in matters of civic knowledge and dispositions than those who did not participate (Billig & Root, 2005). Students are engaged in community service programme, they not only identify, discuss and explore solutions for community problems but also show increased commitment to civic participation (Kahne & Spote, 2008). Civic commitment of students can be strengthened by enabling them to participate in organized service-learning (Hart *et al.*, 2007; Steinberg *et al.*, 2011). Service-learning is positively correlated with civic commitment (Liu & Liao, 2006) and effectively improves students' attitude towards civic action and community issues (Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Lin, 2013).

The main aim of service-learning is to maximize the abilities of students to actively solve community issues and contribute to the society as useful citizens (Kuh, 2008). It is an important element related to service-learning that has yielded attitudinal changes in students' perspectives about social issues. Participation in service-learning increases students awareness about social issues and advocating for social justice (Aberle-Grasse, 2000a). Students investigate the issues and examine their own assumptions and biases. This helps them to develop a broader understanding of social issues (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007). A study has found that students participating in service-learning showed reduced racial and class discrimination, appreciation for diversity and increased desire to work with others who came from different backgrounds (Aberle-Grasse, 2000b). Other studies also support the idea that maintaining direct

with people from different cultures, backgrounds minimizes stereotyping and maximizes appreciation of diversity (Jones & Hill, 2001; Meaney *et al.*, 2008). Research concludes that service experiences in diverse contexts and communities affects students' attitude towards awareness of diversity, learning to accept people from other race and colour, questioning their previous attitudes and beliefs. This brings about positive changes in students attitudes (Wade, 2000). Some researchers predict that sometimes students placement may not change their previous perspectives on multi-cultural exposure in the first place (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007). Civic skills such as problem solving and interpersonal skills are important for engaging students in community work as active citizens (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Some researchers have reported about improvement in communication skills as a result of participating in service-learning (Leung *et al.*, 2007). Despite these evidences, there are some evidences but the results are less reliable (Assendelft, 2008).

Civic Skills

Writers argue that improved civic skills such as communication skills, interpersonal and problem-solving skills (Crossman & Kite, 2007). Most often, communication and problem-solving abilities are discussed in association leadership skill. Leadership skill is one of the essential civic skills. Some of the leadership qualities: ability to lead a group and feeling for responsible for others are reported to be the direct results of service-learning participation but this construct has not been extensively explored (Leung *et al.*, 2007). Some writers have also found that by participating in a service-learning programme students develop leadership skills in different areas such as administration, advocacy and helping others (Couse & Russo, 2006). There are mixed results about students' leadership develop through service-learning participation. A study found that students demonstrated high leadership skills after participating in a service-learning activity, but the psychometric data for this study was not reported (Celia Pechak & Mary Thompson, 2009). In another study it was found that service-learning improved students' leadership but few reported about improvement in leadership traits. Writers argue that 15 week of service might motivate students to initiate change but did not enhance their actual leadership skills (Newman *et al.*, 2007).

Civic Knowledge

Service experience increases the ability to critique societal issues at deeper level and present solutions to challenges of life. It is the results of critical thinking that students do during service activity (Joseph *et al.*, 2007; Li & Lal, 2005). To achieve this, the type of content of the course, discussion and activities are important that are used to enhance students' abilities to find out, analyse and solve problems (Cress, 2003). Another important area of knowledge related to community work is deeper awareness about political structure in the society. Service-learning provides a good environment to develop this understanding (Gorham, 2005). Reflective process is a critical and important tool available for students during service-learning to develop their knowledge about how things work and refine their civic skills along with improvement in political awareness (Blount, 2006). Interestingly, to-date, political awareness as an outcome of service-learning has been frequently considered a subject of political science courses. In 15-20 hours of service-learning course that facilitated students to attend political meetings, interview elected members resulted a change in their perspectives on local policy issues, complexity of political issues and solutions (Blount, 2006; van Assendelft, 2008). However, the gap in the current research is that the themes on political awareness and interest were investigated without a validated scale (Gershenson-Gates, 2012). He further argues that only having skills and values related to civic engagement does not guarantee improvement in civic responsibility and commitment to future community work.

Civic Commitment

A study on university students involved in service-learning course in Hong Kong showed that their desire to work beyond service hours increased and their commitment to work in future increased (Ngai, 2006). A previous large survey study involving 1,322 college students from 28 institutions had found increased political awareness and commitment for social justice among students as a result of service-learning. But the effect was modest regarding civic participation. Several factors such as students' perception about the amount of personal growth and the value of the service to community were identified to influence their different levels of commitment towards future community work (Phillips, 2011; Tomkovick *et al.*, 2008). These findings indicate the importance of knowledge but on the other hand it also shows that not all service experiences result in the same outcomes for student development. There are many issues in the existing service-learning literature. One major issue is comprehensive assessment of civic responsibility due to its wide ranging definitions as a construct. Current research on relationship between service-learning, community involvement and civic participation among students is disparate and diffuse. It makes the holistic picture of the construct of civic responsibility very difficult to ascertain (Jones & Gasiorski, 2009). In

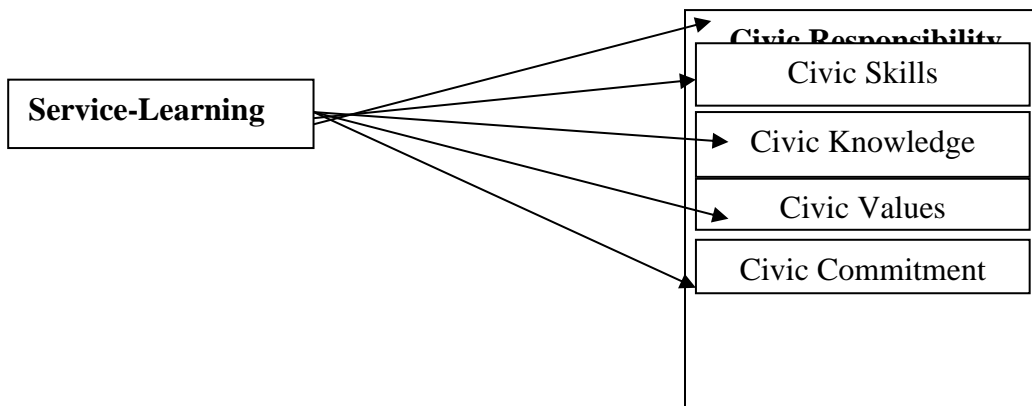
their study Eyler and Giles (1999) found that female students demonstrated more positive changes than males in the area of civic responsibility during the service-learning course period over a semester. Writers argue that the major goals of education are preparation of students for their professional leadership and civic responsibilities (Dean, 2005; Jackson, 2013). Researchers argue that today's rapidly changing social and work environment need active citizens and skilled workers (Colby *et al.*, 2011; Dean, 2007; Fisher *et al.*, 2014; Greenman, 2014; Ichilov, 2013).

Rationale for the Study

Many countries including Pakistan do not prioritize civic education nor use appropriate approaches to develop active citizens and skilled workers (Colby *et al.*, 2011; Dean, 2005, 2011; Fleischmann, 2012; Ichilov, 2013; Torney-Putra & Amadeo, 1999). On the other hand, researchers are continuously reminding educational institutions to nurture future civic leaders (Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). At the same time, worldwide, current employers and organizations are showing concerns about the fast decreasing civic and work-related skills among graduates all over the world (Fleischmann, 2012; Jacoby & Ehrlich, 2009; Lall, 2012; Uzair-ul-Hassan & Noreen, 2013). Pakistan also faces declining civic related skills among its graduates and workers (Abbas & Ahmed, 2014; Dean, 2005, 2008; Kazmi, 2007; Khilji *et al.*, 2012; Raza & Naqvi, 2011; Reising *et al.*, 2008; Uzair-ul-Hassan & Noreen, 2013). There are growing civic deficiencies among Pakistani graduates which needed to be addressed to enable the people to become true democratic citizens (Dean, 2005; Kazmi, 2007; Uzair-ul-Hassan & Noreen, 2013). This study examines the relationship of service-learning with civic responsibility of students and all its four dimensions in vocational training institutes of Pakistan.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to evaluate the effect of service-learning on developing sense of civic responsibility among vocational training graduates in Punjab, Pakistan. The conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1 below.



Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were formulated to test the effect of service-learning on four aspects of civic reasonability.

- H1*: There is a relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility.
- H1a*: There is a relationship between service-learning and civic skill.
- H1b*: There is a relationship between service-learning and civic knowledge.
- H1c*: There is a relationship between service-learning and civic values.
- H1d*: There is a relationship between service-learning and civic commitment.

METHOD

Design and Sampling

The research study was conducted using a survey method. To collect data, questionnaires were administered to a sample of 395 purposively selected students from 6 vocational institutes. These 6 institutes were randomly selected out of the total 284 vocational institutes in Punjab province. Simple random sampling technique was used for selecting the institutes. This technique was because under this sampling strategy, every institute gets an equal chance of being selected and gets equal representation in the total population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Data Collection

For data collection, two survey questionnaires were adapted and used. The questionnaires service-learning scale and civic responsibility scale. The service-learning scale was adapted from Lambright & Lu (2009). There are total 15 items in the original scale. The scale has already been validated with an alpha rating of .93 for the construct (Lambright & Lu, 2009). Permission was obtained from the original writers to use the scales in this study. The civic responsibility scale was adapted from Phillips (2011). The scale consisted of 18 items. Permission was obtained from the authors to use the scale in the present study.

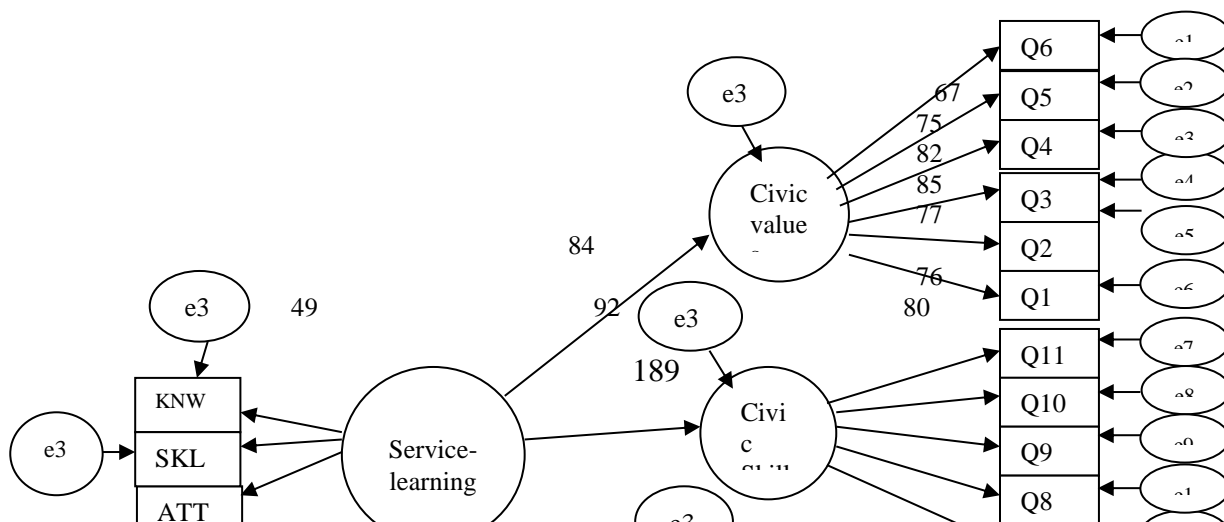
Table 1 Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	249	63.03%
Female	146	36.96%
Total	395	100%
Trade/ Course		
Agriculture/Livestock	58	15%
Auto/Diesel	34	9%
Computer Application	15	4%
Civil Work	70	18%
Mechanical	67	17%
Electrical	16	4%
Health care	48	12.15%
Stitching	49	12.40%
Textile	38	10%

Table 1 indicates that out of the total sample (395) of students, 249 constituted male students with a percentage of 63.03% and female students constituted 146 with a percentage of 36.96% in the present study. The table shows that students with auto diesel trade constituted 9% followed by electrical with 4%, agriculture/livestock with 15%, civil work 18%, mechanical 17%, computer application 4%, stitching 12.15%, textile 10% and health care 12.15% respectively.

RESULTS

Figure 2 indicates the path analysis showing the individual relationship among the independent and dependent variables. More specifically, the path analysis shows the relationship of service-learning with four aspects of civic responsibility: civic skills, civic values, civic knowledge and civic commitment. The analysis indicated that all the items have strong factor loadings showing a good model fit.



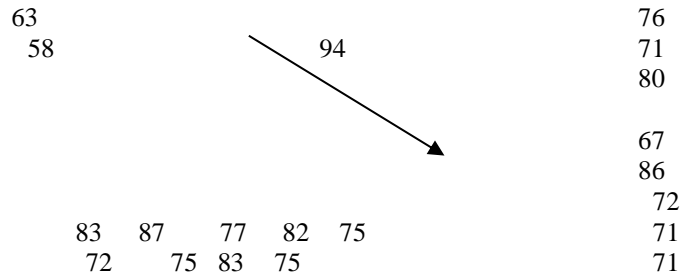


Figure 2: Structural Model 1

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing 1

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Civic Skills	<--- Service-learning	.845	.081	10.485	***	
Civic Values	<--- Service-learning	1.144	.094	12.119	***	
Civic Knowledge	<--- Service-learning	.904	.082	10.959	***	
Civic Commitment	<--- Service-learning	.961	.085	11.311	***	

First, the relationship of service-learning with civic skills was tested. The proposed hypothesis was ‘*There is a positive relationship between service-learning and civic skills*’. Table 2 illustrates the results for the structural model 1. The result demonstrated that the path coefficient value is .845 critical ratio is 10.485 and p value 0.000. This showed there was a positive relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility. It means that service-learning has positively contributed towards civic responsibility of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. Secondly, the relationship of service-learning with civic values was tested. To achieve this, the proposed hypothesis was ‘*There is a positive relationship between service-learning and civic values*’. Table 2 illustrates the results for the structural model. The result demonstrated that the path coefficient value is 1.144 critical ratio is 12.119 and p value 0.000. This showed there was a direct positive relationship between service-learning and civic values. It means that service-learning has positively contributed towards civic values of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. Thirdly, the relationship of service-learning with civic knowledge was tested. To achieve this, the proposed hypothesis was ‘*There is a positive relationship between service-learning and civic knowledge*’. Table 2 illustrates the results for the structural model. The result demonstrated that the path coefficient value is .994 critical ratio is 10.959 and p value 0.000. This showed that there was a positive relationship between service-learning and civic knowledge. It means that service-learning has positively contributed towards civic knowledge of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. Fourthly, the relationship of service-learning with civic commitment was tested. To achieve this, the proposed hypothesis was ‘*There is a positive relationship between service-learning and civic commitment*’. Table 2 illustrates the results for the structural model. The result demonstrated that the path coefficient value is .961 critical ratio is 11.311 and p value 0.000. This showed there was a direct positive relationship between service-learning and civic commitment. It means that service-learning has positively contributed towards civic commitment of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. Fifthly, the relationship of service-learning with civic responsibility was tested. To achieve this, the proposed hypothesis was ‘*There is a positive relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility*’. Table 2 illustrates the results for the structural model. The result demonstrated that the path coefficient value is .941 critical ratio is 11.442 and p

value 0.000. Table 3 illustrates the structural model 2 for this research which shows the overall relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility.

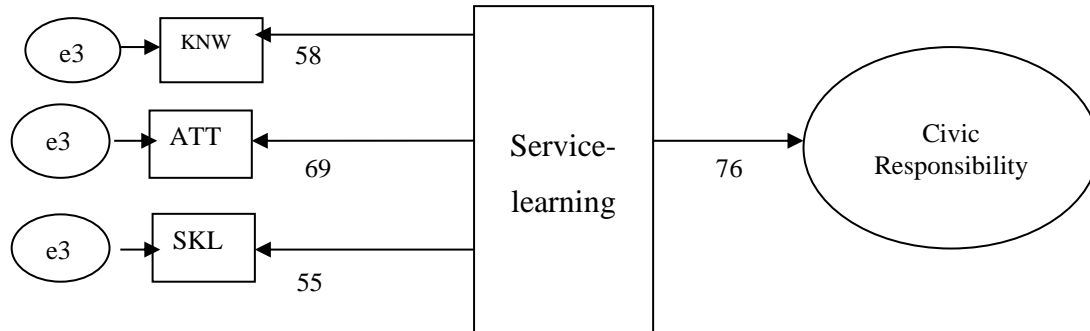


Figure 3: Structural Model 2

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing 2

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Civic Responsibility	<--- Service-learning	.941	.076	11.442	***	

Table 3 indicated that there was a positive relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility. This means that service-learning has contributed towards the civic responsibility of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

This current research aimed to examine the relationship between service-learning and civic responsibility and its four aspects: civic skills, civic values, civic knowledge and civic commitment as well as teamwork skills development and its two aspects: communication skills and decision-making skills of students in vocational training institutes of Pakistan. Based on the results of this research it is concluded that service-learning had a positive relationship with civic responsibility and its four aspects: civic skills, civic values, civic knowledge and civic commitment of students in the said institutes. The results of this study further support the findings of previous studies conducted in other context especially in developed countries such USA, Canada, Australia and France. However, this study was unique as it was conducted in vocational education setting of a developing country. The study found that all the hypotheses formulated to be tested were accepted. These hypotheses were related to the relationship between service-learning civic responsibility and its four aspects: civic skills, civic values, civic knowledge and civic commitment were accepted. The results of this study further explain the citizenship model of Eyler & Giles (1999) who have presented the civic responsibility as a construct having civic skills, civic values, civic knowledge and civic commitment as its sub-dimensions. Moreover, the finding of this research further supported the results of previous studies that students participating in service-learning demonstrate better civic responsibility (Buff *et al.*, 2015; Butin, 2006; Eyler & Giles, 1999b; Furco & Billig, 2002; Warren, 2012). The findings of this study support some other results of recent research in the context of Pakistan in which Ayub et al (2015) found a positive relationship of service-learning and students' civic responsibility in medical field. This result of this study showed a significant improvement in communication skills, knowledge and commitment towards solving community issues. Moreover, the results of this current study further strengthen the findings of studies in other parts of the world where service-learning has already been found to improve students' civic responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Moely et al, 2002; Butin, 2006; Philips, 2011; Gershensen-Gates, 2012; Fisher, 2014). Thus, it

can be safely argued that service-learning is a useful teaching and learning approach that effectively promotes civic responsibility of students.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the four factor model of civic responsibility based on the work of Eyler and Giles (1999) in the field of vocational education of Pakistan using a limited number of samples. However, it is concluded that this model should be further tested in other contexts to get new insights about the applications of service-learning in other fields.

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