

Generation Z Students' Voices on the Role of Universities in Developing Socially Responsible Graduates: A Case Study of South Africa and China

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Abstract: This article reports and reflects on an empirical investigation of the views of selected Generation Z students from South Africa and China on the role of universities in developing socially responsible graduates. In 2020, an online questionnaire was developed and distributed to three university students enrolled in engineering, built environment, and information technology degree programs. There were 417 responses from students in these three fields at the University of Pretoria, South Africa; thirty-one from students at Sichuan University, China; and twenty-three from engineering students at the Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The majority of the students from all three universities strongly agreed that participation in community development projects linked to their field of study should be a required component of their degree programs. The research findings indicate that students in these fields who participated in the study consider themselves among the university's main stakeholders and believe they should be included in curriculum development. Most of these students were positive about embedding socially responsible service-learning in their curricula to prepare them for future roles in a local and global society. The limitations of the study were the following. These students from university campuses in China and South Africa are not representative of all Generation Z individuals in these countries. The validity of the research may be limited as the University of Pretoria's cohort was much larger than the other two universities. Only those students who had enrolled in courses in engineering, the built environment, and information technology were involved in this study.

Keywords: Social Responsibility, Service-Learning, Generation Z, Sichuan University, University of Pretoria, Central University of Technology

Introduction

The social, economic, and political circumstances in many countries have changed over the past decade, and there has been an active interest in social responsibility and active citizenship. Universities' role is expected to go beyond providing academic services (Larrán Jorge and Peña 2017) to include building socially responsible generations that embrace sustainable and environmentally good practices that consider community interests and needs. "University social responsibility" is the phrase used in the global content to indicate the public and community service activities and impacts of higher education institutions (Hollister 2017). University social responsibility impacts a range of internal and external stakeholders. Students remain among the key stakeholders and are directly affected by university social responsibility behavior that influences their experiences and attitudes (El-Kassar, Makki, and Gonzalez-Perez 2019). Various researchers have stressed the need to include a social responsibility component in non-service-related courses, especially through the inclusion of service-learning experiences (e.g., Bielefeldt 2018; Cabedo et al. 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The article answers the question of whether students who are exposed to or involved in a service-learning project understand the concept of university social responsibility. The research that is reported on and discussed in this article aims to investigate whether students, especially those

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enrolled in non-service-related degree programs such as engineering, the built environment, and information technology, believe that social responsibility should be included in their coursework to prepare them to be socially responsible local and global citizens.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What is Generation Z students’ view regarding university social responsibility?
- What is the opinion of Generation Z students about including community engagement in non-service-related courses?

The next section describes the profile of the students who participated in this study. This description is followed by a presentation of the questionnaire’s results, which are used to evaluate the respondents’ understanding of their university’s role in social responsibility. This is followed by the section that describes and discusses the results that were obtained. The article concludes with a response to the overall research question.

Literature Review

Generation Z and Their Social Responsibility

Generation Z (or Gen Z) is known as the digital age generation, with fairly general agreement among scholars that the descriptor refers to young people born between 1995 and 2010 (Ariker and Toksoy 2017). Other names for this generation include the Facebook Generation, Switchers, C Generation, Gen Tech, “i-generation,” “GenZers,” and digital natives (Tulgan 2015; Dolot 2018).

Members of this generation describe themselves with the characteristics such as loyalty, open-mindedness, thoughtfulness, and responsibility (Uche 2018). They also describe themselves as being connected digitally, being influenced by their peers and parents, and being social-change minded and socially liberated. This generation grew up with the internet. This generation is globally aware, especially with regard to political and social issues, and internet technologies have been integrated into all areas of their everyday lives (Turner 2015).

These influences may have affected how Gen Z views social responsibility. According to Silsbee (2020), they are passionate about social change and a sense of purpose. Generation Z students get involved in community engagement opportunities that made a lasting impact (Seemiller and Grace 2017). Csobanka (2016) describes Gen Z as the R Generation (the Responsible Generation). Table 1 indicates the characteristics of Generation Z with regard to their social awareness.

Table 1: Characteristics of Generation Z regarding Their Social Awareness

<i>Characteristics of Generation Z regarding Their Social Awareness</i>	<i>References/Authors</i>
Globally aware of political and social issues	Turner 2015
Driven by humanistic values, morality, and ethical behavior	Entina et al. 2021
Globally connected	Cilliers 2017; Scholz 2019
Being compassionate	Seemiller and Grace 2018; Entina et al. 2021
Loyalty, open-mindedness, thoughtfulness, and responsibility	Uche 2018; Seemiller and Grace 2018
Judgment—willingness to actively search for evidence from various recourses to make a decision	Seemiller and Grace 2018
Passionate about social change	Silsbee 2020; Seemiller and Grace 2017, 2018; Giray 2022
Concerned about environmental issues	Mihelich 2013; Entina et al. 2021
Perception that they can change the world	Seemiller and Grace 2018
Crave a sense of purpose	Silsbee 2020; Entina et al. 2021
Responded positively to the technological innovations	Seemiller and Grace 2018; Entina et al. 2021

Different cultures emphasize different values. What is essential for one culture may not be necessary for another at any time. These values affect the role higher education institutions play within society, what the broader society expects from these institutions, and how the institutions are structured (Burton, Farh, and Hegarty 2000; Hofstede 1980).

This article's study reported on and focused on students in South Africa and China. There are an estimated two billion Gen Z members worldwide. In South Africa, 46 percent of the population is classed as Gen Z (TransUnion 2020), and in China, members of Gen Z account for almost 40 percent of the population (Zhou et al. 2020).

Chinese millennials display similar aspirations as their peers worldwide but are also heavily influenced by traditional culture, recent economic reform, working mentality, and workplaces that differ from those in many other countries. In the past decade, China has shown immense economic growth. China's social and geopolitical significance and its relations with the rest of the world have correspondingly increased in stature. One-fifth of the world's population is living in China, which will be responsible for much of the world's economic growth; China is fast becoming a major military power. OC&C Strategy Consultants (2019) reported that social issues like alleviating poverty and protecting the environment are critical to members of Gen Z in China.

In South Africa, the members of Gen Z are part of the changing political environment. This generation is often referred to as the "born frees," because they were born after the country's first democratic election. As a result, some—if not all—have greater opportunities for study and employment throughout the economy and creative self-expression than was the case for previous generations (Vandeyar 2019).

Universities' Role in Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility

Since the late twenty-first century, the claim has been advanced that universities must be relevant and serve a useful purpose in addressing the most important problem of the day. Otherwise, they become socially irrelevant and cannot sustain as institutions (Boyer 1994). Universities must increasingly justify their rising costs by defending the contribution they make to society (Boyte and Kari 2000; Marullo and Edwards 2000). This includes preparing students to be responsible citizens, being aware of societal problems, and developing courses and research projects to find solutions to these problems. According to Gutmann (1987), Hamrick (1998), Hurtado (2007), and Reason (2013), one of the objectives of higher education institutions must be to develop responsible citizens.

University social responsibility is linked to social responsibility theory, according to which social responsibility governs impacts, not acts. Therefore, without linking up with other stakeholders, responsibility cannot be assumed alone (Vallaey 2013). University social responsibility has been defined as

the ability of the University to disseminate and implement a set of general principles and specific values, using four key processes: management, teaching, research and extension, through the provision of educational services and transfer of knowledge following ethical principles, good governance, respect for the environment, social engagement and the promotion of values. (Bokhari 2017, 10)

A fundamental pillar of a university is social engagement—which is a core mission of higher education and just as important as teaching and research (Bokhari 2017).

Preparing citizens who are willing to engage in community life and who can communicate effectively is an essential part of the mission of all higher education institutes. Reason, Ryder, and Kee (2013) argue that the focus of higher education institutions must be on social responsibility in civic participation and must also attend to personal responsibility development, which students and staff members of higher education institutes believe to be an essential outcome of participation in higher education. El-Kassar, Makki, and Gonzalez-Perez (2019) describe higher education institutions as critical in developing citizens who will contribute fully to society. Such institutions are also entrusted with molding global citizens. As global citizens, they will do their part in ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be met.

Seeking students' voices is also supported by the constructivist learning theory, the motivation theory, and the self-determination theory (Sands et al. 2007). Involving students in the development of courses is beneficial for the educational process, as they are actively engaged and have the opportunity to give feedback on the process (Sands et al. 2007). By positioning students as transformative intellectuals, their civic skills are strengthened, and their written and oratory skills are developed. By providing students with the opportunity to suggest options, they also learn to become change-makers in their communities (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008).

COVID-19 and Higher Education

The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission alerted the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention on December 31, 2019, about a cluster of cases. The center sent a response team to Wuhan, and the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed about the situation (Epidemiology Team 2020; Wang et al. 2020). On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic a "global emergency" (WHO 2020). South Africa reported its first COVID-19 case on March 5, 2020, and a national state of disaster was declared on March 5, 2020 (Broadbent, Combrink, and Smart 2020; Stiegler and Bouchard 2020).

China managed to reduce the number of cases of local transmission through social distancing and confinement measures. These measures were so successful that the WHO recommended and encouraged other countries to adopt these in the rest of the world. China's higher education encountered a variety of challenges with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included higher education institutes' continuing to provide education. By September 2020, most of the classes in China were carried out in a blended learning format (Ma et al. 2021). In China, community and service-learning projects continued indirectly, where students could conduct service without physical contact through e-service-learning projects, where students taught learners in other countries how to code (Leung, Shek, and Dou 2021; Ngai et al. 2021).

From the week of March 16, 2020, universities in South Africa suspended all academic activities. On March 27, 2020, when the national lockdown came into effect, South African campuses were closed to students and staff. Students in their final years who were enrolled in programs requiring clinical training were allowed to return to campuses only under Alert Level 4. Universities were permitted to allow only 33 percent of their students to return to campus under Alert Level 3. Universities could use their discretion within the directive guidelines to plan students' and staff's return to campuses (Van Schalkwyk 2021). All universities suspended face-to-face community projects. The University of Pretoria (UP) identified e-service-learning projects or projects that could be done from home as an alternative to face-to-face projects to continue with community engagement projects (Jordaan and Mennega 2021).

Service-Learning in Non-Service-Related Courses

One of the ways social responsibility competencies are integrated into non-service-related courses is through service-learning. Service-learning responds to social demand and is an experience-based approach to teaching and learning. Learning takes place through action and reflection. Students work with their peers to address a community issue or concern. Cabedo et al. (2018) state that students cultivate their civic and social responsibilities and develop multiple human dimensions.

The focus of the study was on two different countries and three different universities. Two universities in South Africa (the UP and the Central University of Technology [CUT] in Bloemfontein) and one university in China (Sichuan University [SU], located in Chengdu City in Sichuan Province) were involved in the study. The UP is a multicampus public university in the administrative capital of South Africa. It is the largest residential research university in South Africa, with 53,430 students enrolled in 2020 (UP, n.d.). The CUT (n.d.) is a public university of technology and is situated in the judicial capital of South Africa, with 21,000 students enrolled in 2021. SU is

a public research university in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, and had 60,400 enrolled students in 2021. Students from China involved in this study are enrolled in the undergraduate Wu Yuzhang Honor College at SU (n.d.).

Community engagement is integrated into the White Paper for Postschool Education and Training in South Africa (DHET 2013). To ensure that students in non-service-related courses, like engineering, computer science, and the built environment, get involved in the broader society, the UP has developed a module for all undergraduate students registered in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. This compulsory module entails that students must work for forty hours in the community and thereafter reflect on their community project through various assignments (Jordaan and Jordaan 2022). Although the CUT is yet to have any compulsory service-learning modules, this institution encourages engineering students to get involved in the broader community through service-learning projects. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students undertake community projects that include providing training in the use of computers and various software suites that may benefit community members (Markus, Elisha D., January 19, 2021, personal communication).

The Chinese National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) indicates that higher education institutes must add “students’ sense of social responsibility to serve the country and the people” to the curriculum (Hollister 2017). The Chinese traditional moral standard, the “new moral education,” which was initiated at SU, focuses on students’ social responsibility and citizenship awareness. Its implementation, the LinLu Plan, which means “rain and dew” in Mandarin, carries out responsibility education activities based on community volunteer service, cultivates students’ strong sense of social responsibility, and guides students to care for the society and for others while promoting an awareness of citizenship. The LinLu Plan offers students from the Wu Yuzhang Honor College of SU, China, the opportunity to be teachers and homework guides for primary school students who lack parental guidance. The students also are supportive of community service being part of the curriculum (Wu Yuzhang College, n.d.). For example, Matkovic et al. (2014) indicated that students favor a curriculum that addresses their own perceived needs and that such a curriculum is the most motivating. Such perceived needs may or may not include opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in socially responsible service-learning.

Methodology

This study is characterized as a descriptive research and uses a qualitative approach to obtain actual information from Generation Z students. As Koh and Owen (2000) indicated, “descriptive research generates qualitative and quantitative data that define the state of nature at a point in time.” The focus of this study is to gain insight into the perceptions of students enrolled in non-service-related fields with regard to their social responsibility and their understanding of university social responsibility.

According to Kelley et al. (2003), surveys can be developed to provide a “snapshot” of how things are viewed at a specific time. The conditions and variables are not controlled or manipulated. First, the survey (henceforth called the “questionnaire”) was distributed to ten students in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at the UP UP. The researchers then addressed issues that the students had identified as requiring clarification by amending the questionnaire accordingly. Ethical approval was requested and received from UP’s Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology to continue with the research. Permission was also obtained from the CUT and SU to continue with the study.

The questionnaire was created in Qualtrics, and the researchers distributed it to second-year students enrolled in engineering, built environment, or information technology at their respective universities in March 2020. UP distributed the Qualtrics questionnaire (see Table 2) via its learning management system to students enrolled in the Community-Based Project Module (code: JCP) in its Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. CUT distributed the

Qualtrics questionnaire via email to its second-year engineering students and second-year students in engineering, built environment, and information technology at the Wu Yuzhang Honor College of SU. The responses were downloaded from Qualtrics and added to the transcribed document. The themes were identified with ATLAS.ti (Version 6.2.27, Berlin, Germany), which was also used to store and code the data.

Table 2: Questionnaire to Students of UP, CUT, and SU

1.	What is your field of study?
2.	What is your gender?
3.	Did you do any community outreach projects or volunteer work before 2020? If “yes,” please indicate what you did.
4.	Who initiated this community project?
5.	During the COVID-19 pandemic, did you do any volunteer work (e.g., online work or projects at home)
6.	Was the project related to the COVID-19 pandemic self-initiated or initiated by the University?
7.	What projects did you do during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8.	Do you think the University’s mission should include actions to help students fulfill their social responsibility? Yes/No. Give a reason to support your response.
9.	Do you feel the University is responsible for the broader community during the COVID-19 pandemic? Yes/No. Give a reason to support your response.
10.	Do you think that degrees at university should include compulsory work or volunteer work and assessing activities to meet society’s needs? Yes/No. Give a reason for your response.
11.	To what extent do you think doing a community project will affect your employment possibilities?

Before completing this questionnaire, students were required to indicate that they understood the questionnaire’s nature and objective and to give informed consent to respond to it. They were made aware that the results of the study would be published. The first two questions determined the respondents’ demographics. The third and fourth questions determined whether the students had any previous community engagement experience. Four questions addressed community projects and university social responsibility during COVID-19. Three questions expected the students to reflect on the university’s social responsibility, while the last question addressed the value of a community engagement project to be ready for work. The three open-ended responses were qualitatively coded and categorized according to themes using ATLAS.ti.

A total of 471 completed questionnaires were received, of which 31 (100% completion rate) came from SU, 23 (100% completion rate) from CUT, and 417 (21.84% completion rate) from UP. In terms of gender, 56.7 percent identified as male, 41.0 percent as female, and 1.5 percent of students did not specify their gender. Majority of the participants were engineering students (58.3%). Students at UP who were enrolled in information technology (26.2%) and built environment (15.2%) programs also completed the questionnaire. Questionnaires completed at SU also included students in information technology (9.7%) and built environment (6.5%) fields.

Results and Discussion

The students’ responses with regard to their university’s role in developing socially responsible graduates were categorized into three themes as discussed below:

- Theme 1: Previous community engagement and volunteer work experience
- Theme 2: The role of the university in the development of the students’ social responsibility
- Theme 3: Community engagement as part of the curriculum of non-service-related degrees
- Theme 4: Universities’ response to COVID-19 with regard to their social responsibility.

Each of the three themes explains the various strata that universities need to consider in their quest to develop socially responsible and civic-minded graduates.

Theme 1: Previous Community Engagement and Volunteer Work Experience

It was important to determine whether students had previously done any community engagement or volunteer work, as such experiences would likely influence their responses to other questions. All students who participated in the study were enrolled in non-service-related degree programs, and their career focus was not related to a service action. Overall, 50.3 percent of respondents indicated that they had some volunteering experience, with a high percentage of CUT students indicating that they had no experience (78.3%).

Some students indicated that the volunteer or community outreach project they had been involved in had been initiated through their schools (24.4%) or universities (7.4%). Students also participated in projects that had been initiated through a range of religious organizations, bursary providers, or youth organizations. While a low percentage of the projects were student-initiated (11% at UP, 6.5% at SU and 4.3% at CUT), this evidence of student agency is of interest.

Theme 2: University's Role in the Development of the Students' Social Responsibility

The students were asked whether they thought the university's mission should include actions that aim to equip students to fulfill their social responsibility. The results are presented in Figure 1. The responses of 63.7 percent of the students indicated that the university's mission should include actions to help students fulfill their social responsibility. However, 14.9 percent of the students indicated that any community outreach project must apply only to those degree programs that relate directly to people, such as teaching, health sciences, social work, or psychology. The students' study area might have influenced these responses as they were all enrolled in non-service-related programs.

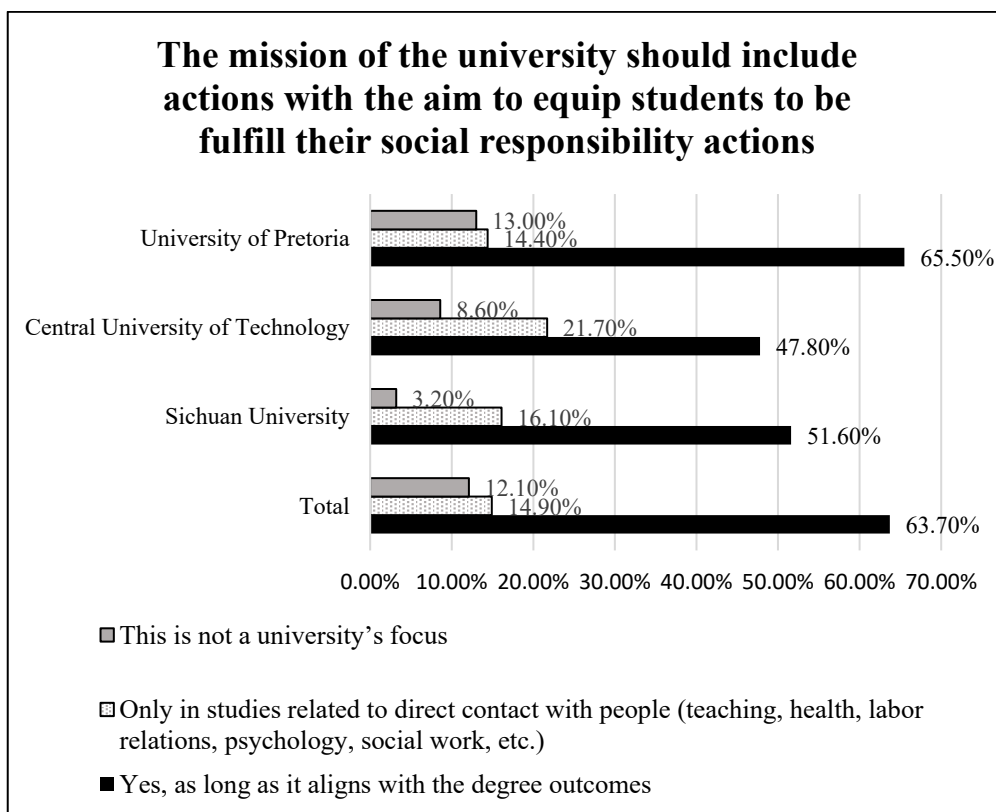


Figure 1: University Degree Programs Should Include Compulsory Elements That Aim to Equip Students to Fulfill Their Social Responsibility Actions

The majority of students responded positively to the question about whether the university's degree programs should include elements that would equip students to fulfill their social responsibility. One SU student noted that "it's just a natural responsibility for a university" (Respondent 12, SU). Some students could see the broader value of community work in their coursework. For example, Respondent 248 from UP stated that "community work should be encouraged, so that future leaders know that, in order to build a sustainable world, you need to be conscious of individual needs within a community." Another student shared a long-term vision and responded that "community engagement teaches students about leaving a legacy, which is important as it also creates a sense of accomplishment and purpose" (Respondent 296, UP).

A minority of UP students responded negatively and felt that "the government should be doing social work, not students" (Respondent 142, UP) and "doing community work has nothing to do with the degree and does not prepare you for the working world" (Respondent 177, UP). One student was of the opinion that "it's a university's responsibility to force their students into an outreach or community project" (Respondent 191, UP). Most of the degrees for non-service-related courses in South Africa do not include a compulsory service-learning component in their undergraduate courses.

Theme 3: Community Engagement in the Curriculum of Non-Service-Related Degrees

To determine the students' opinion with regard to service-learning or community engagement work in the curriculum, they were asked whether degrees at a university should include compulsory or volunteer work and activities aimed at meeting society's needs. Only 36.9 percent of the respondents agreed that the university should include mandatory or volunteer work and assess activities aimed at meeting society's needs. Nearly a third of the respondents (29.9%) indicated "maybe" as their response to this question. The students at UP were more positive regarding this question (40.3%) than the students from SU (9.7%) and CUT (13.0%). The reason may be that the students from UP were already part of a group that was enrolled in a compulsory undergraduate module focused on service-learning. In comparison, at CUT, service-learning is implemented on a limited scale. Students at SU are enrolled in a prestigious academic college where the focus is predominantly on academic results.

A majority of the students (63.70%) agreed that community engagement should be included in the curriculum as long as such engagement is aligned with the degree outcomes. Of this majority, 34 percent believed that awarding credits for such a module would be appropriate if it was directly linked to their studies or if it did not "count" for more than 5 percent of the qualification (25.3%).

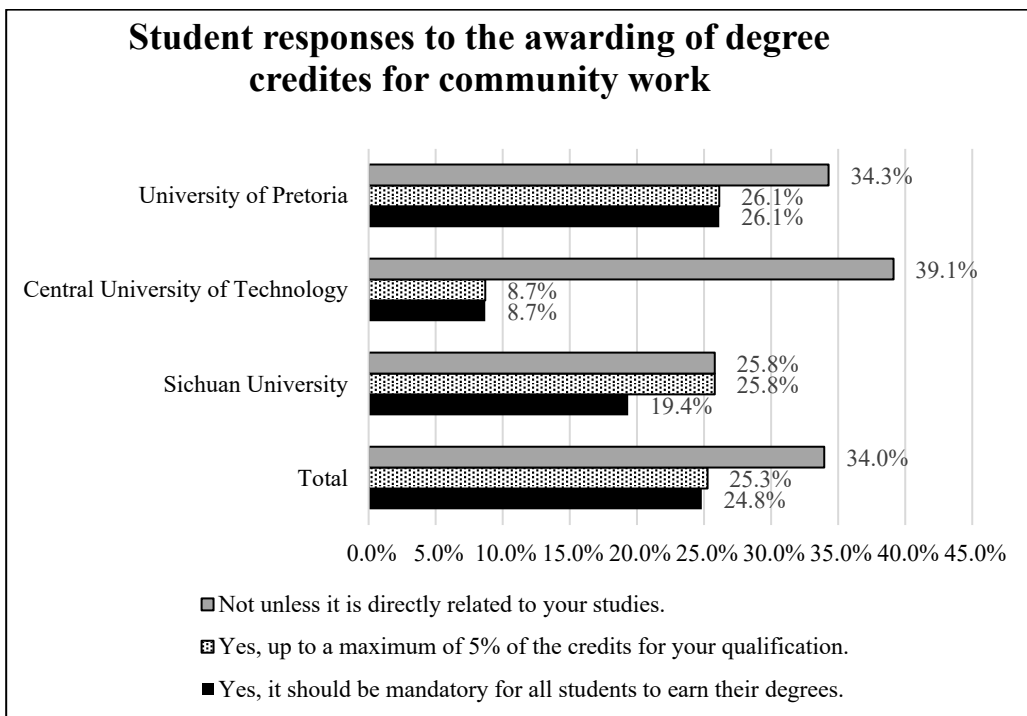


Figure 2: Students' Responses to the Awarding of Degree Credits for Community Engagement Work

Overall, students were more positive that credits should be awarded to such a module if it were related to their studies (Figure 2). Students who reflected on the value of community work for their future careers in an open-ended question were positive overall (64.82%) and were of the opinion that community work would add value to their employability. Students' responses regarding the value of community work for their future careers were strongly linked to the idea that community work must be relevant to their coursework.

One student reflected,

it will show my future employers that I value the community and care about the wellbeing of my community...and that my degree has more to it. Its purpose is to not only open doors for me employment-wise. However, it also serves the purpose of enriching other people's lives in our society. (Respondent 309, UP)

Another student indicated,

people studying something so focused around growth and innovation should be made aware why this innovation is actually necessary: it's there because it is supposed to better the lives of people. For example, a water-related engineer who is working on a dam needs to be able to realize it's more than a collection of water; it's vital to the wellbeing of the people who use their dam: they cook, clean with and drink that dam's water. (Respondent 267, UP)

A third student reflected, "doing community project, generally speaking, is one of the ways to repay our society, which supports plenty of capital for us. Employment is not our priority. And in a way, doing community projects can indeed higher our possibility to be employed." (Respondent 17, SU). Other responses noted the following: "Well, as an engineering student, I

don't see how that helps me unless it is a project that is related to my studies, which will come in handy in my engineering career" (Respondent 482, CUT). "If students are never exposed to some of the real needs of society, their 'innovation' as engineers (in my opinion) is not truly going to be for the betterment of society in the way that society actually needs" (Respondent 267, UP).

Theme 4: Universities' Response to COVID-19 as Part of Their Social Responsibility

Two questions were asked in relation to the COVID-19 epidemic. The questionnaire was distributed during the first half of 2020. China had already passed the first wave, while the first wave had just reached South Africa in March 2020, and the country was under Lockdown Level 5. This meant drastic measures needed to be implemented to contain the spread of the virus. UP's Community-Based Project module initiated various projects related to issues of COVID-19, including making and distributing masks and assisting teachers with online teaching (Jordaan and Mennega 2021).

Approximately 88 percent of UP's students indicated that they were involved in a COVID-19-related community project compared to 74.2 percent of students from SU and 34.5 percent of students from CUT. The respondents indicated that the projects were mainly initiated for a module (UP: 39.8%; CUT: 13%; SU: 6.5%) or the university (UP: 29%; CUT: 4.3%; SU: 38.7%).

The respondents believed that the university is responsible for the broader community during the COVID-19 pandemic. A student from SU reflected: "As a university student, every year our government pays a great deal of money to help us develop ourselves, so helping the society is our responsibility" (Respondent 17, SU). One of the students from UP also addressed the privileged position of university students and noted: "With the economy declining, it is only fair and just to help those in need, there [sic] a lot of university students who come from those backgrounds" (Respondent 189, UP).

Summary of Findings

Based on the four themes identified in the feedback from the students, certain implications could be identified. First, it was determined whether the students had had any previous experiences in community engagement or volunteer work. The UP and SU students indicated that they had had more previous experience in this field than the CUT students.

The students from UP and SU were also involved in various community outreach projects, either through a module or through structured outreach projects. However, the students from CUT had not yet been exposed to any structured community engagement programs initiated by their university, and their responses differed in many instances.

Second, the role of the university in the development of students' social responsibility was determined. Students from all three universities believed that their universities needed to include actions that would help students fulfill their social responsibility. They also had different opinions about whether community work could add value to their curriculum. Third, students reflected on community engagement in the curriculum. Most of the students agreed that community engagement should be included in the curriculum as long as it aligns with the degree outcomes. They suggested that a maximum of 5 percent of the credits should be awarded in their qualification for this. Overall, the students were of the opinion that community work in the curriculum might have value for their future careers. Fourth, students indicated that they believed the university was responsible for the broader community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students who participated in community volunteer activities or projects did so as a requirement for the modules of their respective qualifications. Although the pandemic hampered a lot of community-based projects as movement was restricted, universities' policies and practices of social responsibility underwent a paradigm shift by considering more virtual ways of reaching out to communities. This was evident in the students' responses to the many initiatives embarked upon during the pandemic.

Limitations

A number of limitations underlined this research. The article reflects on a case study of three higher education institutions. It focuses only on two very diverse countries. In one of the higher education institutions, students were not actively involved in a service-learning program. The participants were invited to participate in the study and did so voluntarily. The research demonstrates only a small amount of critical awareness of alternative and competing perspectives, approaches, and paradigms. It does not expand on the overall idea of community service programs.

Conclusion

According to Degtjarjova, Lapina, and Freidenfelds (2018, 391), “students are the most important stakeholders...of higher education.” Therefore, students must be encouraged to express their views on curriculum development in university degree programs. According to the British Heart Foundation, Gen Z is more likely to volunteer for charities than other age groups (Kay 2019). It could be argued that, as stakeholders in their curriculum, students should be provided with relevant exposure to a community engagement endeavor as part of their degree program. The major findings in this study is that a significant number of questionnaire responses from students enrolled in non-service-related degree programs in engineering, the built environment and information technology at two South African universities and one university in China indicate support for the inclusion of service-learning courses where these are aligned with the outcomes of the curriculum. As they are key stakeholders in the university, we argue that all higher education institutions should canvass students’ views on the university’s role in meeting its social responsibility and the inclusion of community engagement in curricula. This study’s findings suggest that university curricula developers, particularly curricula for professional degrees, should motivate faculty members to include service-learning and community development projects in their courses to enable students to develop skills and knowledge related to socially responsible service-learning.

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