Service-Learning impacts on students
' learning from graduates' perspectives

Abstract

Service-Learning (S-L) is a pedagogy widely adopted by some Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong. S-L is a combination of academic learning and meaningful service through reflection which also puts teaching and learning in a social context for facilitating socially responsible knowledge transfer (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009). S-L, which reflects Lingnan's motto "Education for Service", has been integrated into the curriculum at Lingnan University since 2006. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the impact of S-L on whole-person and career development from the graduates' perspectives because there is only a limited body of prior studies in this area. Moreover, the findings can inform teaching and learning via S-L, on the basis of graduates' perspectives on what students need, in order to flourish in their future careers. Besides incorporating a quasi-experimental design, a mixed-method approach was adopted for the research. In the quantitative part of our research, a quota sampling approach was adopted, under which six groups of LU graduates based on their year of graduation and on whether they had undertaken S-L were invited to complete the questionnaire between June and September 2018. In total, 424 graduates with S-L experience and 416 graduates without S-L experience completed the online questionnaire. In the qualitative part of our research, a sample of interviewees was selected based on the logic of Maximum Variation Sampling. 13 graduates with S-L experience were invited to participate in a one-to-one telephone interview. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and content analyzed using grounded theory. The findings indicated that S-L experience has significant perceived impacts on the student's career choices, self-perceived research skills, and civic responsibility, which proof the S-L impacts on teaching and learning.

Background

- Lingnan University aims to provide students with skills, competences and sensibilities for pursuing their goals in society and to foster a sense of civic duty in order to prepare the students to be the future community leaders (Lingnan University, 2017)
- The Civic Engagement requirement was introduced in 2012 (Lingnan University, 2013).
Service-Learning (S-L) as a graduation requirement was implemented in 2016-17, which reflects Lingnan's motto, "Education for Service".
- S-L not only enhances students' whole person development (Nagai, 2009; Chan, Lee & Ma, 2009), but also influences students' career choices (Astin et al, 2000; Warchal & Ruiz, 2004).
- The 1st impact study have been conducted in 2012 (Ma, Chan & Chan, 2016) .

Literature Review

- Most of the S-L research in Hong Kong has focused on the impact on learning outcomes among existing undergraduate students (Chan, Ma & Fong, 2006; Chan et al., 2009; Shek, Yu, Wu & Chai, 2014; Ngai, 2009) rather than on the longer-term impacts on alumni (Ma, Chan, & Chan, 2016).
- Korfmacher's (1999) study highlighted that recommendations from alumni can maximize the benefits for instructors, institutions, and S-L researchers.

Objectives

- To investigate the impact of S-L on whole-person and career development from the graduates' perspectives

Methodology

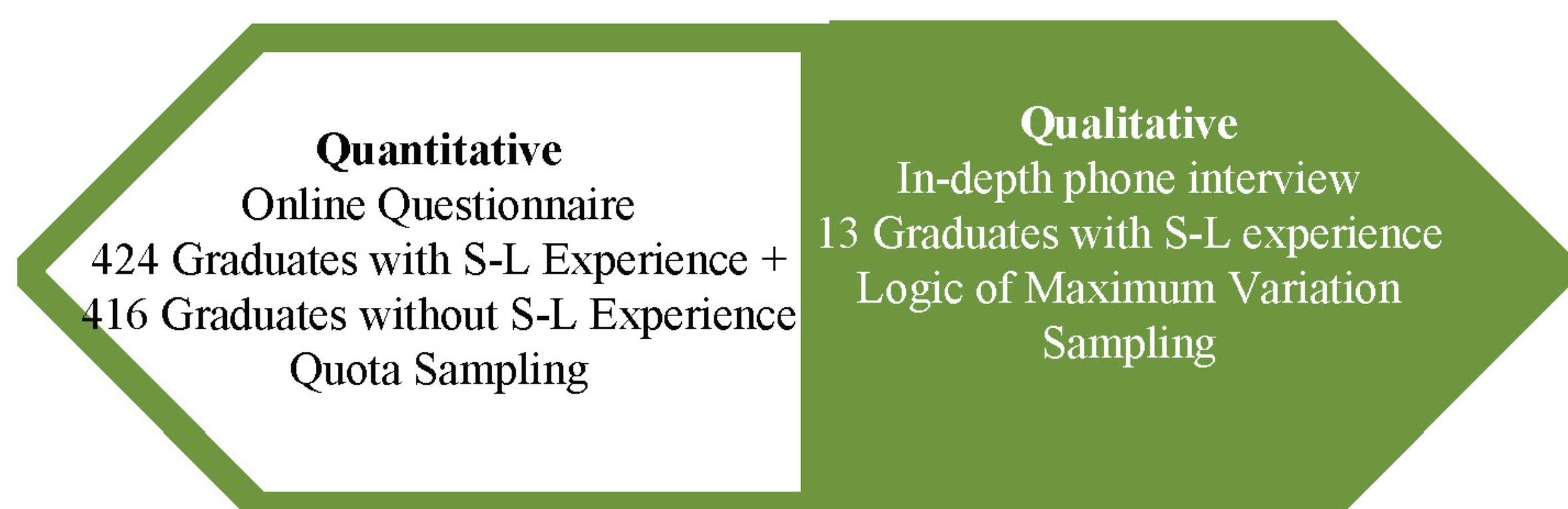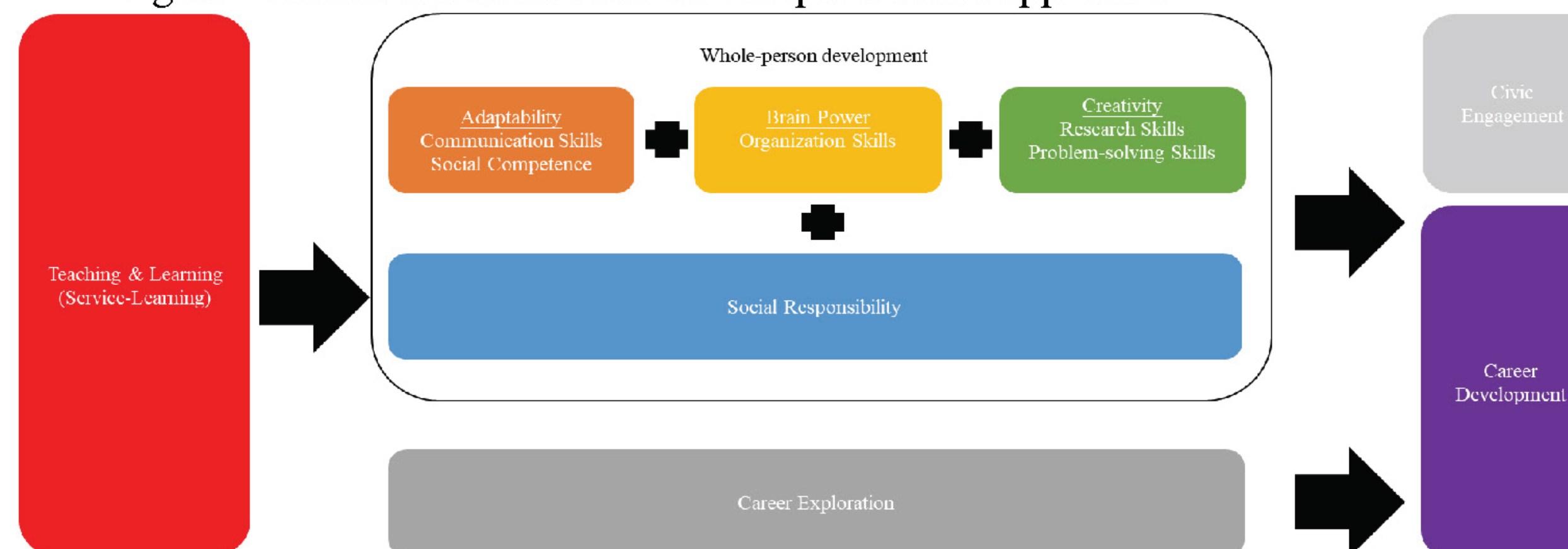Figure 1: A mixed-method approach was adopted for the research.

Quantitative
Online Questionnaire
424 Graduates with S-L Experience +
416 Graduates without S-L Experience
Quota Sampling

Qualitative
In-depth phone interview
13 Graduates with S-L experience
Logic of Maximum Variation Sampling

Figure 2: Research framework for the quantitative approach

Quantitative Findings

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the experimental and comparison groups

	Experimental Group (with S-L experience)		Comparison Group (without S-L experience)		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Male	97	22.9	149	35.8	246	29.3
Female	327	77.1	267	64.2	594	70.7
Total	424	100.0	416	100.0	840	100.0
Degree						
Arts	143	33.7	169	40.6	312	37.1
Social Sciences	125	29.5	139	33.4	264	31.4
Business	156	36.8	108	26.0	264	31.4
Total	424	100.0	416	100.0	840	100.0
Year of Graduation						
2006-2011	92	21.7	242	58.2	334	39.8
2012-2015	148	34.9	134	32.2	282	33.6
2016-2018	184	43.4	40	9.6	224	26.7
Total	424	100.0	416	100.0	840	100.0

Table 2: Patterns of career development of the experimental and comparison groups

	Experimental Group (with S-L experience)		Comparison Group (without S-L experience)		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Job Sectors						
Arts & Culture	20	4.7	13	3.1	33	3.9
Commerce & Industry	136	32.1	140	33.7	276	32.9
Community & Social Services	49	11.6	38	9.1	87	10.4
Education	95	22.4	99	23.8	194	23.1
Government	36	8.5	34	8.2	70	8.3
Public Utilities	20	4.7	14	3.4	34	4
Others	68	16	78	18.8	146	17.4
Total	424	100	416	100	840	100
Salary						
$10,000 or below	16	3.8	7	1.7	23	2.7
$10,000-19,999	243	57.3	124	29.8	367	43.7
$20,000-29,999	108	25.5	146	35.1	254	30.2
$30,000-39,999	31	7.3	83	20.0	114	13.6
$40,000-49,999	12	2.8	28	6.7	40	4.8
$50,000 or above	14	3.3	28	6.7	42	5.0
Total	424	100.0	416	100.0	840	100.0
Average Time Taken for Seeking First Job	M=2.72, SD=5.33		M=2.84, SD=4.24		M=2.78, SD=4.82	
Average Working Experience	M=42.30, SD=38.01		M=73.03, SD=44.16		M=57.59, SD=43.94	

Table 3: Independent samples t-test results between the experimental and comparison groups

	Experimental Group (with S-L experience)			Comparison Group (without S-L experience)			t-value
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
Whole Person Development							
Communication skills	424	7.52	1.29	416	7.43	1.45	.92
Organization skills	424	7.54	1.25	416	7.47	1.35	.77
Social Competence	424	7.68	1.27	416	7.58	1.42	1.04
Problem Solving	424	7.52	1.27	416	7.46	1.36	.66
Research skills	424	7.45	1.40	416	7.24	1.57	2.08*
Overall	424	7.55	1.13	416	7.45	1.26	1.14
Civic Responsibility							
Connection to Community	424	6.72	1.60	416	6.26	1.74	4.00***
Civic Awareness	424	6.32	1.72	416	5.76	1.85	4.54***
Civic Efficacy	424	5.98	1.86	416	5.44	2.01	4.03***
Overall	424	6.23	1.67	416	5.70	1.80	4.43***
Career Exploration							
Overall	424	6.65	1.63	416	6.33	1.76	2.72**

***$p< 0.001$; ** $p< 0.01$, *$p<0.05$

Qualitative Findings
- Important Skills for Career Development
Communication Skills (Networking)
Problem-solving Skills
Proactive Attitude
- S-L can help graduates to develop the skills for their career development

I think the soft skills I learned from participating in service learning are useful for my current work. (2014 BBA Graduate)	S-L has not directly affected my career plan. However, the professional knowledge and soft skills (such as problem-solving skills, communication skills) trained through S-L have been very helpful to me in my current work. (2017 BA Graduate)	I improved my communication skills with elderly people through S-L which has giving me an advantage in interview. (2016 BSS Graduate)

Limitations

- In the quantitive study, there were relatively fewer recent graduates in the comparison group and relatively fewer older graduates in the experimental group.
- Results are based on LU only. Most other HK universities are now adopting S-L, but our findings may not so easily generalize because other universities approach S-L in different ways.

Conclusions

- Both qualitative and quantitive study, S-L experience has significant perceived impacts on the student's choice of career path.
- S-L significantly enhances civic responsibility and average service hours.
- Qualitative findings indicated the soft skills (e.g. communication skills, problem-solving skills and proactive attitude) developed by S-L projects are useful for graduates' current work.

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