Service-Learning in Language for Specific Purposes: A Case of Korean Language Practicum

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1 Introduction

Service-learning has been increasingly recognized as an effective instructional tool in education over the past two decades. Bringle & Hatcher (1995) define academic "service-learning" as "a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity to gain further understanding of course content (p. 112)."

Service-learning differs from community service or volunteerism in that the service-learning is incorporated with course academics and critical reflection, and aims to strengthen students' learning from community service, thereby achieving a specific educational goal. While community service or other types of volunteerism is primarily designed to benefit community partners, service-learning seeks mutual benefits. Therefore, community engagement service-learning projects not only address community needs, but also tailor to student learning needs by allowing them to integrate learned classroom knowledge into real-setting practice (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Bettencourt, 2015; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007).

1.1 Challenges of Service-Learning in Less Commonly Taught Languages

In the context of the growing attention to service-learning in education, many language programs have also offered service-learning courses for language learners (Hellebrandt, Arries, & Varona, 2004; Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Morris, 2001; Olazagasti-Segovia, 2003; Kim, & Sohn, 2016). However, less commonly taught language (LCTL) programs such as Korean have faced realistic challenges when implementing the existing model within their small programs.

One primary challenge is the accessibility of the Koreatown or Korean communities due to being far from the university. Students have not been motivated to commute more than two hours every week and incur transportation expenses for course credit. Community partners do not compensate volunteer students due to the nature of the service-learning course. In addition, government-related communities (e.g., Korean Education Center) no longer accept student volunteer services due to a new government policy, thus further limiting Korean community involvement opportunities for students.

Given that only a few universities are located near Koreatown or Korean communities in the U.S., this perceived difficulty is applied to most Korean programs in U.S. Furthermore, this issue is not limited to only the Korean language. Many other LCTLs may share similar difficulties due to limited access to their respective local communities.

1.2 Motivation for Campus Service-Learning Integrated with Language Practicum

To overcome the disadvantages related to the location or lack of an off-campus Korean community, we designed the individual-based language practicum course in a service-learning framework in collaboration with the campus community, that is, lower-level Korean courses in the Korean Program.

Most Korean programs in the U.S. have seen a strong demand for language assistants or tutors who can interact and engage with students enrolled in lower-level Korean courses. However, few Korean programs have developed a systematic program or organization to support this need. On the other hand, upper-level courses have struggled with low enrollment due to the small number of non-heritage students at the advanced level. Also, the language teaching practicum course is not easily offered in a small language program in which the undergraduate major degree is not established. The course is typically offered at the graduate level in the form of a certificate program. Therefore, a simplified version of the language practicum on an individual basis is suggested to accompany the service-learning course in the form of an experimental or pilot course. Language practicum courses including advanced-level Korean heritage students and international Korean students can satisfy the needs and wants of both groups (i.e., lower- and upper-level Korean courses) and enjoy mutual benefits.

In addition, the importance of establishing peer networks in campus communities to support the academic communities of minority students and small language group students has been emphasized in much past research (King de Ramírez, 2016; Leeman, 2011; Tinto, 2000; Wenger, 1998). The educational significance of campus peer networks offers an alternative to the service-learning environments and the difficulties caused by the lack or absence of off-campus civic communities. Some researchers have implemented campus community engagement as a part of their service-learning projects and found positive pedagogical implications for both the service-learning participants and the community partners (see King de Ramírez, 2016 for Spanish broadcast campus radio program; see Lee-Smith, 2018 for Korean Mentor-Mentee program).

The benefit of Korean heritage learners' service-learning with a language tutor was discussed in prior studies (Kim & Sohn, 2019); however, the service was conducted in a local language institute, not in a campus community. Also, a campus service-learning mentor-mentee project between Korean language learners and international Korean graduate students was reported (Lee-Smith, 2018), but the service was not for language practice, tutoring, or practicum, but focused instead on career and academic paths. Thus, Korean language practicum service-learning in collaboration with a campus community remains to be explored. Furthermore, while a growing body of literature has discussed the effects of service-learning in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) (Lear, 2012; Ruggiero, 2019), it has not yet been extensively applied to the Korean classroom setting.

1.3 The Current Study

This study explores the curriculum design of service-learning for a small language group and how service-learning, when integrated with language practicum and a campus community, can benefit LCTL groups and learners. The article offers practical ideas on how to expose the students to a campus community and provide them with professional languages in teaching Korean and awareness for cross-cultural insights that extend beyond classroom instruction-based learning.

Based on the pedagogical notion (Clevenger-Bright et al., 2012) and the school policy on service-learning courses, we have developed a triple-component language practicum service-learning course involving: (i) in-class activities of group discussions, oral reports, and academic lectures; (ii) a 10-week community service project outside the classroom (25-30 hours); and (iii) individual reflection on service and academic learning.

Specifically, students enrolled in the service-learning course (i.e., practicum students) obtain the basic skills and knowledge for teaching the Korean language through classroom lessons as part of the academic learning component. For the service component, the practicum students were individually matched with students enrolled in beginning and intermediate Korean classes (i.e., service partners), and each practicum student was expected to design their own service session for a 10-week timespan based on the schedules of the both service-learning class and the beginning and intermediate classes. They created their own class materials and activities based on academic learning. Students thereby gain practical experience through which they are able to apply learned academic knowledge while serving and engaging in the community. In addition, students have weekly homework assignments that consist of writing individual reflection pieces regarding their service and academic learning. Students also engage in group discussions and give oral reports in class.

A brief diagram for the overall course flow is given in Figure 1. The details of each component in Figure 1 and the sample curriculum development of the service-learning course focused on Korean are discussed in the following sections. Additionally, the article expands on the pedagogical implications of language learners' community engagement within the academic curricula, benefits of such a course to both communities, and positive impacts on students' professional and cultural proficiency and leadership skills. Challenges and improvements are also discussed.

Figure 1. Sample Course Flow of Service-Learning
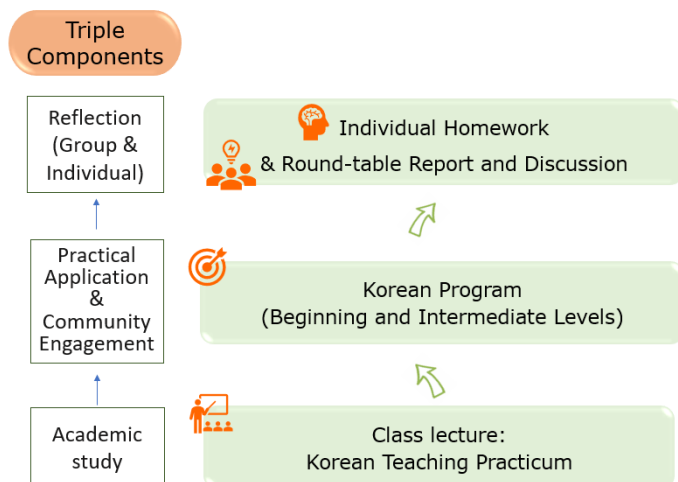
Six Korean heritage students (Korean-Americans) and two international Korean students were included in this study[1]. They were enrolled in the course, "Korean Community Service-Learning," offered to the 4th-level students who have successfully completed advanced Korean (3rd level) or have demonstrated an equivalent proficiency level.

2.2.   Campus Community Service Settings

The first two weeks of the course were dedicated to giving introductory lectures on service-learning and how to prepare and carry out this experimental course. During these weeks, we also began to recruit community partners who were willing to participate in the service-learning project. Eighteen students from beginning and intermediate Korean classes were recruited, and they were matched with the service-learning student participants according to their schedule through a school's approved shared document (i.e. One Drive). Each participant was assigned two to four members in his or her service project, and all participants were responsible for setting up the service day, time, and place at their own convenience.

Student participants (i.e., practicum students) worked for a minimum of 25 hours during the 10 weeks of the semester. For the service activities, participants were encouraged to not only include the required assignments provided by the instructor based on the class lesson schedule, but also to actively assume the role as a project leader to design and create their own service content that includes communicative and/or cultural activities for each service session. While the service tasks themselves varied depending on the community partners' needs and demands, the primary focus was to improve conversational and speaking fluency, which is the element most lacking among students in beginning and intermediate Korean classes. Thus, the participants were expected to come up with conversational topics and questions to engage their service

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[1] Three non-Korean heritage students were enrolled in this class as well and they were matched with the Korean students learning English in Georgia Tech Language Institute. This case was not included in the current study.

partners. Other optional activities included playing Korean games, assisting partners' Korean homework, dining out in Korean restaurants, or going on a field trip to Koreatown.

2.3. In-Class Settings and Reflection Assignment

After the initial two-week training and preparatory period, the class met once per week for two hours. The class met once a week for a two-hour long class period. In-class activities started with the student participants' individual oral reports and group discussions. Each of the participants made informal presentations regarding their service session experience of the previous week—including the benefits, challenges, and improvements—and discussed any issues or positive highlights from their services.

Subsequently, academic lesson of language teaching practicum was offered, and the following topics were selected based on the curriculum of the beginning and intermediate Korean classes in the Korean program: how to teach (i) brief history of the Korean language and alphabet, (ii) Korean linguistic sounds and phonological/phonetic rules for pronunciation, (iii) Korean case markers, (iv) Korean speech styles (polite vs. non-polite) with honorifics and humble forms in different settings, (v) Korean irregular verbs, and (vi) complicated expressions in terms of semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic structures (e.g., differences between several expressions of future-tense). In addition to learning how to teach Korean, students also learned the historical origins and cultural background of some Korean idiomatic expressions and had a session for discussing 'my own tips for foreign language learning.'

As for the 'Reflection' component, weekly homework assignments were given. The students were expected to watch a variety of audio-visual materials that were relevant to the class lessons via authentic media resources and answer the given questions. The written reflection assignment included responding to the academic lecture-related questions and writing a critical reflection of their own service session held the previous week.

Course content and reflection assignments emphasized three areas: (i) a focus on background and history of Korean cultures and language, and critical and reflexive thinking about cultural norms; (ii) tactics to strengthen students' effective communicative skills, including building vocabulary and idiomatic expression skills and reviewing specific grammar points; and (iii) linguistic analysis and language teaching methods of native and foreign languages to benefit the community partners.

Overall, course requirements consisted of five elements: (i) Class attendance and participation (10%), (ii) Oral report (15%), (iii) Service (40%), (iv) Reflection (25%), and (v) Final project (10%).

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this course was collected to examine the impact of service-learning on both the student participants and the community partners. The assessment of service-learning was analyzed in three ways: (i) self-response through course surveys; (ii) community partners' feedback; and (iii) instructor's response through the students' reflection assignments, oral

reports, group discussions, and final project.

The course survey for student participants and service feedback for community partners were conducted anonymously during the final week of instruction. The survey questions consisted of rating scale questions (scale of one to five, with 'one' being strongly disagree to 'five' being strongly agree) and short-answer questions. The majority of this survey consisted of rating scale questions, as written opinions were already collected in the form of reflection assignments submitted to the instructor weekly. Survey questions were created based on the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics from American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and previous work on service-learning courses (DuBold & Kimball, 2016; Kim & Sohn, 2016). The survey was distributed to all student participants and community partners through an online survey tool (i.e., Microsoft Forms) or via e-mails.

Other than the survey for the service project, student participants' weekly assignments and activities were also designed to evaluate the progress of their language and cultural proficiency. The reflection writings and oral reports were completed every week as a part of the assignment and in-class activity, respectively. Students' linguistic skills as well as cultural awareness were evaluated through their reflection assignments surrounding the authentic media resources and in-class oral reports. The detailed content of the service project and the students' creativity and originality were assessed through their individual final projects. For the final project, students created course trailers with the theme of "My Service-Learning Journey," outlining both the service-learning course and their own service experience in various formats. Students chose one of the following five formats for their final project: creating a (i) 3-min. video clip; (ii) website; (iii) magazine, (iv) poster, or (v) newspaper.

3.   Findings and Impacts

3.1.   Practicum Students' Self-Assessment Through Survey

The survey data was collected at the end of the semester, and all eight practicum student participants responded to the course survey. Twelve rating-scale survey questions (1: strongly disagree -5: strongly agree) were categorized in the following six themes, and the score results are reported next to each theme: (i) positive impact on application of academic studies (4.4/5); (ii) problem solving (4.3/5); (iii) relationship building (4.6/5); (iv) positive impact on career choices (4.1/5); (v) enhanced self-esteem (4.5/5); (vi) better understanding of the community (4.6/5); and (vii) course satisfaction (5/5). A visualized graph with a percentage ratio (%) for each assessment theme is given in Figure 2. All categories were highly rated, supporting the positive effect of the service-learning experience on the pedagogical values described above.

Figure 2. Service-Learning Course Participants' Self-Assessment
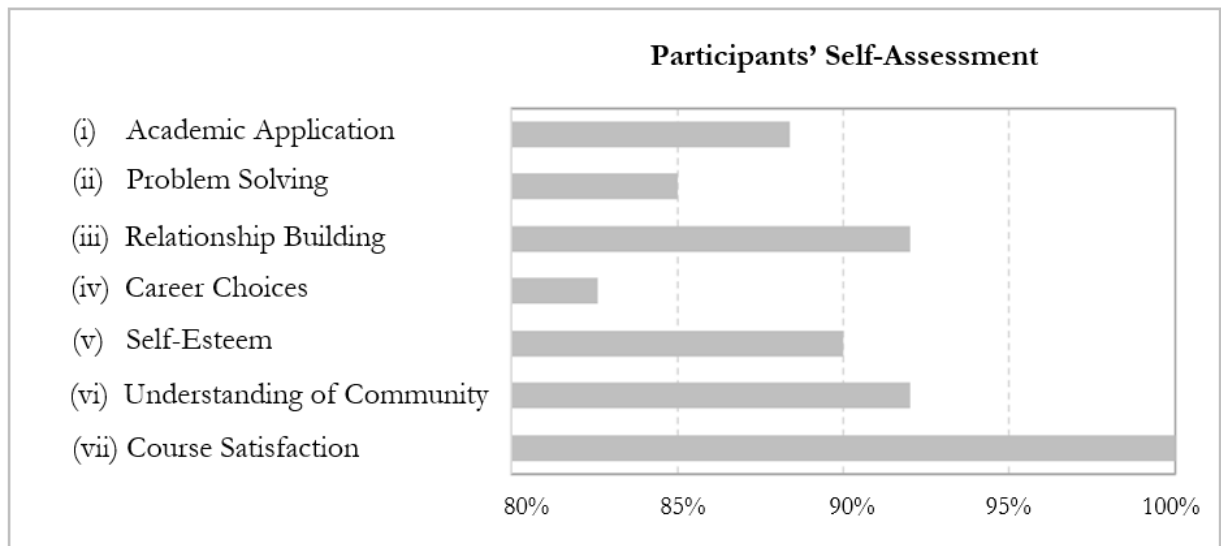
It is notable that the question related to the impact on career choices earned a relatively low score. This result may be attributed to the fact that the community was not directly related to the civic company or business. However, two participants commented in their reflection writings that they realized that they had a talent for teaching. Although this revelation did not play a significant role in impacting the students' career choices, their comments allow for the possibility of the service-learning experience having a positive influence on the participants' self-awareness, an essential component when making a career choice.

Two short-answer survey questions and students' sample responses are given below. Most practicum students spoke highly of providing their partners the accessibility to authentic and natural Korean language and culture and the opportunity to strengthen their partners' conversational skills through service-learning experience. As for the challenges, students mentioned the lack of motivation of some community partners and mixed proficiency level of the partners.

Question 1: Provide a paragraph about the most successful and beneficial aspects of your service.

> *I believe that the most successful part of the service was getting the students out into the real world to interact with people. My partners do well with textbook language but have difficulty with the spoken language in society. Taking them out into the city or going to events and interacting with them was much more memorable for both me and the partners, while also getting them exposed to and practicing language that is used outside of the classroom.*

Question 2: Provide a paragraph about the challenges and improvements for your service.

> *The most difficult part was the communication with a few of the partners. It all comes down to motivation and willingness to learn. Those who did not care as much also did not show up as much. In the future, if there is a way to find partners who are eager to learn Korean, I believe that this problem will be eliminated. Also, I think it would be best to cap the amount of partners to 2 per person. This will allow the service project to be more one on one, enabling each partner to learn and practice more.*

3.2.   Community Partners' Assessment Through Survey

The survey data was collected at the end of the semester and 14 out of 18 community partners responded to the survey regarding the service that they had received. Ten rating-scale survey questions (1: strongly disagree -5: strongly agree) were created based on the following evaluation categories, and the result scores are reported next to each theme: (i) meeting arrangement (4.8/5); (ii) communication skill (4.9/5); (iii) time management (4.6/5); (iv) initiatives and responsibility (4.9/5); (v) creative & innovative ideas for the session (4.7/5); (vi) preparation & effort (4.7/5); (vii) enthusiasm for the session (5/5); (viii) overall quality of the service (4.9/5). A visualized graph with a percentage ratio (%) for each assessment category is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Community Partners' Assessment for the Service
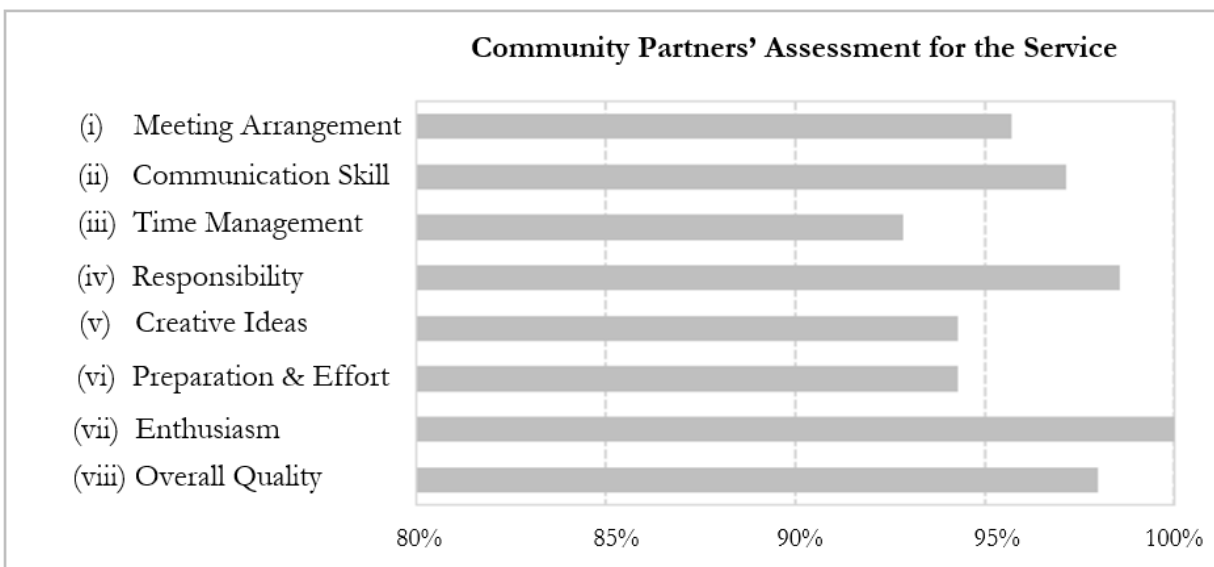
All categories were highly rated (above 90% for all categories), and all respondents gave full points for the project leader's enthusiasm and overall satisfaction for the service. Community partners' feedback supports the positive impact of the service-learning project both on course participants and community partners.

Two short-answer survey questions regarding the overall quality of the service and students' sample responses are given below. Students emphasized the practical benefits of improving their language skills as well as entertaining aspects which can be lacking in the classroom setting. These comments also highlight how the project leader designed their service session in their own unique and creative way. As for improvements, students wished to have more frequent sessions, more individualized settings (one-on-one rather than group), and unified proficiency level in a group.

Question 1: Provide a paragraph on the overall quality of service.

> *(practicum student's name) provided excellent service. She gave me one on one attention and also made sure we were doing something beneficial. I can tell just from this semester my speaking abilities have greatly increased and I feel more comfortable speaking Korean. I would love to continue with this service in the future.*

> *I really liked it! And I think it really helped my speaking and listening and making me more confident in speaking and forming sentences.*

Question 2: List the session's weaknesses and suggested improvements.

> *no weaknesses, only improvement I would say is to have longer sessions but that is difficult to plan.*

> *No complaints! Only way they could be improved would be to have them more often.*

3.3.   Instructor's Assessment Through Students' Final Project, Reflection Writing, and Oral Report

Throughout the semester, we were able to observe the practicum students' learning progress via various means including reflections, in-class oral reports and discussions, and final projects. The reflections demonstrated that the initial mistakes and challenges of the service session had been reduced and resolved through personal reflection, by adapting new ideas from class discussions, or from implementing partners' opinions.

As a climax of all the course work, the final projects summarized their service-learning experiences and the overall course in their own creative ways. While appreciating the students' final projects, we deeply recognized that this peer-group campus community service can offer a valuable hands-on opportunity for students to implement their leadership and proactive skills by encouraging them to design and create their own service project details. Rather than being directed by the manager or the boss of off-campus communities, each student as a project leader was able to actively arrange, practice, adjust, improve, manage, and achieve their plan successfully over the semester. While the on-campus community engagement was initially

brought up to replace the off-campus communities due to our school's locational restriction, the leadership practice turned out to be one of the most remarkable advantages of the campus community-involved service-learning.

4.   Improvements and Conclusion

It is noteworthy to address some planned course improvements for better implementation of the second trial. Although most inputs were based on students' concurring comments, we, as language instructors, entirely agreed with their feedback: (i) it would be better to unify the community partners' language level rather than having a mixed-level group, and the most effective target might be the intermediate level to create more dynamic conversational interactions and (ii) both the project leader and the community partner prefer to work one-on-one rather than in a group setting, albeit a few community partners mentioned that group interactions created a more fun and vital atmosphere. In the current service, a project leader had two to four community partners, and they met altogether or individually according to their schedule. However, most student participants and community partners commented that the individual meeting was more beneficial.

Overall, the article presents how the acclaimed service-learning model can be applied to small language groups such as Korean. The readers can obtain practical strategies and ideas on curriculum design for a service-learning course, so they can initiate a service-learning class based on their own unique language program environment on campus, and work around the lack of an established local community or town near the campus. This study also confirms the benefits of service-learning for language learners, not only for their linguistic and cultural proficiency development, but also their leadership and intercultural connections with the target communities that could not have been accomplished in the classroom setting alone.

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