

# Potential of Service-Learning on Students' Interpersonal Skills Development in Technical and Vocational Education

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## Abstract

Developing students' Interpersonal Skills is a core element of any well-designed Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) particularly in this present era. This is couple with the fact that Interpersonal skills are among the crucial skills preferred in the world of work setting for the betterment of both employer and employee. Over the years, employers of labour have drastically observed decline in interpersonal capabilities of high school graduate for meeting the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace's challenges. However, abundant literatures have indicated the potential roles of service-learning in providing students to achieve knowledge, cognitive skills (discipline specific Skills) and core employability skills specifically the interpersonal skills required in 21<sup>st</sup> century workplaces. It is on this regard that this library work shed light on the concept of interpersonal skills, concept of service-learning, influence of service-learning in TVE for improving students' interpersonal skills and the needs of interpersonal skills in TVE related job places. In conclusion, the paper discloses that the fact that there is crucial demand for TVE graduates to posses interpersonal skills and other work skills for effective job performance in the competitive global work environment, it was finally recommended that in order to ensure no skills gap, educators in TVE training institutions, should equip the forthcoming TVE graduates with the necessary skills for employment by lying more emphasize on renown and superior instructional pedagogies such as the Service-Learning.

**Keywords:** technical vocational education, service-learning, interpersonal skills

## 1. Introduction

Everywhere around the world, interpersonal skills have been considered as a very important human springhead for both individual and work place development particularly in the current reality of life. In light with the above, researchers in many fields of studies have recommends for the needs to provide trainees in high school with this skill. In addition, several departments of labour in both developed and developing nations in most parts of the world have identified and recommend the teaching of these employability skills including interpersonal skills by integrating them into their school curriculum. Therefore, it deemed necessary for educators to ensure the transfer of these skills to the new generations of youth. Above all, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (2008) lamented that this can assist countries especially the developing nation to build and reinforce their education for the ever changing world of work.

Interpersonal skills required by employers at the job place according to scholar and book Authors on interpersonal skills stated that this skills are mostly learn by workers/people on the basis of experience, through unscheduled and unintentional procedures of trial and error and a times this approach is successful but it can be unreliable and ineffective (Belbin, 1993; Berscheid, 1994; Hayes, 2002). However, employers of labour are currently complaining that fresh employed school graduate has to attend to a training on particularly modules that focuses on building interpersonal skill through behavioral changes before commencing work (Cline, 2005; Jameson, 2009; Griffin, 2009). This scenario avail in many continents and countries of the world, for example in United State there are programmes such as Club Houses, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), Sheltered Workshops, Transitional Employment Program, and Diversified Placement Approach (DPA) (Evans & Repper, 1999), in Asia Pacific Region have EQ training & Development, MMM training Solution, Green Jobs Network (AP Green Job), Industrial Relations Network (AP-IRNet), Youth Employment Network (AP Youth Net Work)

(International Labour Organisation ILO, 2012), in Europe include Skills Funding Agency, skills off, Reed Learning, Gilwell Park, CIPD Training, Development Process Group (DPG), Inspirational Development Group (Training Zone, ND), in Africa comprised of vocational rehabilitation centres, Dubai consultancy training services (DCTS), Education and training (E&T), Enterprises-based development (EBD), Keybase training Solution and skills tree (African Directory of special training, 2005). All these are social skills/interpersonal skills development agencies that provide training to labour organizations and individual that needs to upgrade their skills in order to face the current challenges of workplace.

Griffin, (2009) conducted a study with 46 TVE related organizations on the way new employee are provided with non-technical skills for work, the researcher obtained that out of 46 organizations 43 responses are having common opinion that fresh graduate has to attained to inaugural training organized by private training institution and sponsored by the employers before commencing work. However, researchers/experts in TVE has acknowledged and reported this slip-up; that most TVE training institutions including high school are greatly focusing and emphasizing their instruction on technical skills with little on non technical skills. On the other hand, TVE policy makers/curriculum designers have stipulated into instructional guide document the needs for educators to teach both the two skills area for the purpose of diversifying the employment potential of the graduate in the labour market. Yet everywhere around the world particularly, in the developing countries; non technical skills including interpersonal skills of workers in the workforce remained an issue of concern to both the workplace and the individual employees (Ismail, Yussof, & Wie, 2011; Archer & Davison, 2008; Baker & Henson, 2010; Mcleish, 2002).

In another related development, numerous literatures has reported that despite the fact that the need for skills training has been rigorously embedded in policy documents, yet TVE teachers' over rely on unpromising instructional approach that do not yield sound and required skills for work to students and has been the basis for this horrible situation of graduate skills deficiency in many parts of the world especially, the developing ones (Dasmani, 2011; Bello & Aliyu, 2012). Virtually, this has reveals lack of an explicit and commensurable training device that builds specific and concrete interpersonal skill for work.

Researchers in numerous fields of human endeavor for instance, Nursing & health care Education (Stein-Parbury, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Kagan & Evans, 2001; Klakovich, 2009; Manser, 2009), Sciences (Wong, 2001, Business Management and Marketing Research (Lovett, Jones, & Solis, 2005), Tourism & Hospitality Management (Clark, 1997; Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Kamau & Waudo, 2012; Suh & Shin, 2012), Law (Dayton, 2011, Spencer, 1993), Industrial Technology Education (Fitrisehara, Hamzah, & Bakar, 2009; Mustapha & Greenan, 2002; Bakar & Hanafi, 2007; Ejiwale, 2008) Administration (Holland, 2003; Cline, 2005), art and Humanities (Senge, 1990; Johnson, 1998; Montouri, 2000) and many to mention but few, have commonly agreed and advanced reasons that interpersonal skills and other work competencies can best be learn in school through experiential learning approach that can expose the learner to interact with real life physical environment and individuals in the society that he/she may likely to meet at work after graduation.

Indeed, technical and vocational education (TVE) that provide Career and social orientation to it recipients for laying solid foundation for work in order to build a person to become self reliant and to empower a nation economically, socially, technologically for global competitiveness. Thus, technical skills are not enough for the students; they require some tactful and considerable social skills especially, the interpersonal skills to make the graduate of TVE adjust to dynamic and competitive changes of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century era. For instance Training Zone (ND) & Archer and Davison (2008) lamented that workplace social/interpersonal skills for work are up wide dimensions but the most frequent are unacceptable handshakes, inappropriate manners at meals, improper introductions, and unsuitable lunch behavior as well as some general office errors. On the other hand, Schaffer & Kelley (1993) recommends that TVE students be taught the art of social/interpersonal skills in part of their learning as exercises that can involve observing, modifying and practicing behaviours in order to acquire and improve specific social/etiquette skills for work.

However, Service-Learning instructional pedagogy is a reciprocating type of education programme including two equally essential aspects: "Service" and "Learning", both of which connect students to the society closely. For students, Service-Learning provides them with more opportunities to be more devoted to our society, and to improve their interpersonal skills and intrapersonal intelligence simultaneously. For societies, Service-Learning offers a diversity of activities, facilitating citizens' enthusiasm for and participation in public affairs. For schools, Service-Learning presents a brand-new channel for interaction. Thus, teachers are more than instructors, and students are more than learners. Instead, this is a cooperative learning that helps students with their adjustment to societies.

## 2. Concept of Interpersonal Skills

Available literatures reviewed for the purpose of this paper on the term interpersonal skills such as Belbin (1993), Hayes (2002), Cline, (2005), Griffin, (2009) and Miller, (2010) have general consensus that Interpersonal skills refers to those human behaviors and way of thinking that exist within every one of us that persuade our relations (interactions) with others. These interactions include trustworthy, extrovert or silence, as well as passive or dictate. Miller further lamented that Interpersonal skills are indispensable attribute toward maintaining positive and peaceful job place atmosphere and without these skills, relations within an organization become hostile. Another researchers, Kennedy (2003) & Jameson, (2009) highlighted that lack of interpersonal skills among worker can results to workplace dissatisfaction, increase job place divergence, decrease positive communication, promote workplace misunderstanding and increase stress conditions. In addition, Lawler, Mohrman, & Benson, (2001) reveals that possession of these skills allows executive and assistants to relate to each other on a more delicate, less businesslike level.

The skills of interpersonal relation is about building work-mutual relationships needed to achieve an outcome within a workgroup, or achieve goals through team based collaborations. It involves the capacity to understand others and build rapport, which in turn involves understanding one's own values, goals, expectations and emotions, and making choices about regulating one's own behaviour, taking the needs of others, and the often implicit following the social set of rule of the job place framework into account.

## 3. Concept of Service-Learning

Service-learning is an instructional method structured to trains young people learn and develop through dynamic participation in thoughtfully-organized service knowledge that meet definite community desires, coordinated in corporation with the school and community, integrated into each young person's (student) academic curriculum, Provide the structured time for a young person to reflect, speak, and note down about what he/she performed and saw during the actual service action, Provide young people with chance to make use of newly gained knowledge and academic skills in real life situations within their own community groups (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform, 1993). It also facilitates learner's ability to accomplish the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills especially in the widening student's sense of caring for others that can go beyond the classroom situation

Moreover, Service-learning is an educational strategy that involves students in meaningful service to their schools and/or to society, while engaging them in some form of reflection and/or study related to the service. A Well designed and High quality service-learning Instructions according Colorado Department of Education, (2010) are characterized by eight component as illustrated in figure 1 below. Certainly, this trend of practice has been demonstrated in numerous disciplines such as anthropology, environmental science, psychology, urban planning, economics, political science, biology, computer science, mathematics, and physics, as well as the social sciences (Batchelder & Root 1994; Herzberg, 1994; Kennedy & Mead, 1996).

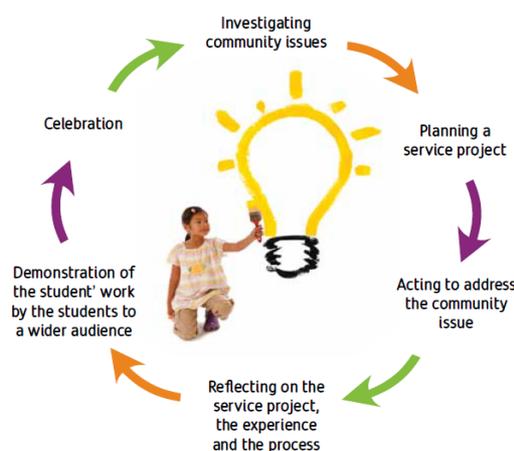


Figure 1. Components of a high quality service-learning  
Source: Colorado Department of Education, 2010

In early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Research Agenda for Combining Service and Learning, (1990) service-learning in the USA was considered both as program and philosophy of instruction. It was a program type, due to the fact that

service-learning comprises myriad means that students can do suggestive service to their communities and to society while involves in numerous reflection or lessons that has linked to the service. As a philosophy of education, service-learning reflects the belief that education must be linked to social responsibility and that the most effective learning is active and connected to experience in some meaningful way. However in the middle 21<sup>st</sup> century, the USA educational stakeholders envisaged the Framework for 21st century learning that can be used to support American education. The Framework structured on key areas of learning including non-technical skills (life skills, employability skills, soft skills) and it was agreed that service learning to be the best answer for the construction of 21st century skills. This development has long been incorporated in the educational framework of many nations including other developing worlds such as South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, etc. Unfortunately, other countries particularly developing nation could not embrace this innovative and renown instructional approach.

#### 4. Interpersonal Skills Needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Work Place

Today there is heightened awareness on the need of interpersonal skills as one of the core ingredient in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work. Many TVE educators, policy makers and curriculum formulators are having believes that development of these competencies is a genuine role of educational programmes and is not inherent in several conventional TVE systems (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2010). However, Mustapha & Greenan (2002) and Ejiwale, (2008) further laments that instead, more attention is focus toward ascertaining and utilizing instructional strategy that trains for knowledge and discipline specific skills with few attentions on nontechnical skills that employers and public are also insisting on from graduate of high schools.

Abundant literatures have traces and support the importance of interpersonal skills. But the question is what are they, and which ones are most important? Goleman (1995) stated that "Emotional Intelligence" that includes both Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills is up higher priority and contributes more to workplace success than Intelligent Quotient. This Author further stipulated that on average; almost 90 percent of workers success was attributable to "emotional intelligence" and outlined the following "Emotional Intelligence" as having these four competencies:

- Self-Awareness: Being aware of your own needs, values and emotions and their impact on your behavior
- Self-Management: Keeping your emotional reactions in check and being able to behave appropriately when you experience feelings that could result in destructive behavior
- Social Awareness: Being in harmony with other's thoughts and desires
- Relationship Management: The capacity to makes relationships based on mutual trust and respect

Besides, to the above four listed items, Goleman (1995), Ireland, (2007) furthermore, identified the following interpersonal skills and stated that these skills are of paramount in order to pave way for effective work with people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work:

- The capacity to resolve conflict: Respectively managing differences of opinions and seeking win-win resolutions
- Problem solving: selecting the right course of action while taking the needs and perspectives of others into account
- Communication: Speaking with clarity and directness while showing appropriate sensitivity to the receiver
- Listening: Being able to hear other people's perspectives while suspending judgment
- Demonstrating responsibility: Doing what you say you will do, when you say you will do it
- Sense of responsibility (Being accountable for your actions): Not creating excuse or faulting others
- Showing appreciation: Letting other people know you value them and their help
- Flexibility: Being open to new and different ways of doing things.

Thus, TVE graduate that is capable to acquire these skills is likely to have some personal payback in the current competitive society. As earlier mentioned, these skills are extremely cherished in the workplace and a person who possesses them is seen to add great value and additional career opportunities to him/her self as a result. Possessing strong interpersonal skills is also strong predictor for career success. Also when managing or leading other people, it is principally critical.

#### 5. Service Learning and Interpersonal Skills

Today Service-learning is one of the several top trends in pedagogy that mark a shift in high school education from an emphasis on teaching to one on learning. Among the other trends are a focus on problems rather than disciplines, an emphasis on collaborative rather than individual learning and careful articulation of learning outcomes coupled with assessment of learning success (Ejiwale, 2008 & Jameson, 2009). It is a social network setting that comprised of so many individuals; the community people, school teachers/administrators and

students from different socio-cultural, background and locations. Evidence from many researchers, for instance Barbara, (2009) & Weah, Simmons & McClellan (2000) reveals that the multiplicity of compositions found during service-learning instruction has been widely recognized and acknowledged as being multidimensional avenues that brings about so many learning outcomes including understanding and mutual respect for different points of view.

In another views, service-learning experts (Meyer, 2006; Yamauchi, Billig, Meyer, & Hofschire, 2006; National Youth Leadership Council, 2008) corroborates that in an instructional Projects such as the service-learning that has effective approaches to diversity provides participants to identify and understand multiple perspectives and self construct ranges of interpersonal skills in decision making and conflict resolution. Moreover, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Peterson, and Allen (1999) added that students in education field such as TVE that socialize through mix of persons from numerous cultural backgrounds are more likely to be tolerant of diverse ideas, accepting of people unlike themselves, and are more likely to be culturally aware.

However, as TVE students completed studies from training school and joint work places for employment; Employment organization likes graduate that posses enough and relevant skills for work. This is virtually for the realization of the current reality in the world of work that many public and private employment sectors are willing to accomplish through their employees. In commensurable to this demand has prompt employers to heavily requires and over-rely on workers that can pay sufficient attention to the management of face-to-face relationships (Hayes, 2002). Similarly, this has become a challenge for TVE training institutions to produce graduates that can squarely address the current needs of the work places by examining and shaping the goal-directed behaviours that crop high-quality interpersonal competencies in student for achieving desired workplace outcomes.

## 6. The Needs for Interpersonal Skills in TVE

Generally, all people need to use interpersonal skills in the course of everyday living to be able to experience the richness and excitements of lives. The range of what constitutes interpersonal skills is vast, as it is earlier mentioned. They formed what is called the interpersonal skills as parts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century generic skills for wok. Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2012) identified that non-technical skills (employability skills or generic skills) as the most important ingredient that highly contribute to work performance. DIISRTE & DEEWR (2012) further lamented and illustrated in figure 1 on how non-technical skills in combination with discipline specific skills (technical skills) and core language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) have influence on workplace performance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work.

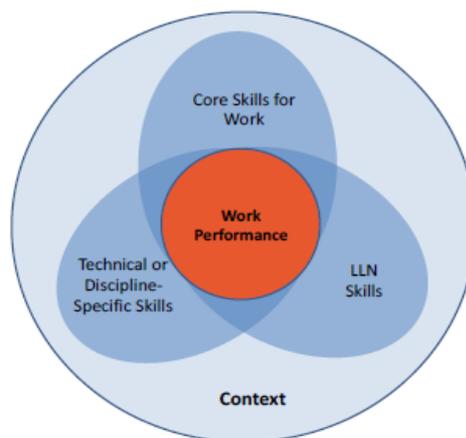


Figure 2. Core skills for work place context  
Source: DIISRTE & DEEWR, 2012

However, non-technical skills for work have been the most useful skills and ranked as core skills for work in the employment sector today. This comprised of range of skills but not limited to interpersonal skills along (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006; Stain-Parbury, 2009). Specifically, in the TVE context, Kamaul & Waudo (2012), Rejewski (2002), Yusoff (2008) and Miller (2010) lamented that interpersonal skills has been one of the essential

skills that strengthen TVE graduates to understand occupational roles and job place liberties and potentialities, provide competence to discover and handle responsibilities, identify and respond to legal rights and responsibilities, and to recognize and retort to expectations and conventional practices of occupational conditions.

Perhaps, this could be the reason why certain categories of employers have clearly reassured TVE high school that

*“a prime example of what they need more of in high schools is self-directed and engaged learning that makes academics come alive for all TVE students while they’re learning the skills of interpersonal/social skills, problem-solving, critical thinking, and effective communication and that Service-learning is the superlative techniques that can make that experiences common and realistic for students” (Reveltoda & Shaud, 2009)*

However for the betterment and success of the forthcoming generation of youth, educators around the world in many field of study are required today to do something unprecedented. Generation of teachers and administrators has been called upon to ensure that every student – not just some, or even most – meets rigorous learning standards to meet up the needs of today and future challenges.

Conversely, bulk evidences exist to supports learners’ acquisition of employability skills including interpersonal skills through the multi-face components involves in the service-learning events as outlined in figure 1 above. Few to mentioned are Weah, Simmon & McClellan, (2000), Meyer, (2006), Holland, (2003) & Cline, (2005) lamented that it makes the student to interact among them self, community members and educators to provide them with the best and numerous interpersonal skills that are suppose to learn during conventional school instruction. The fact that interpersonal skills essential workplace application skills Hayer (2002), no doubt service learning experiences at the same time expose individuals to make use of skills learn during the service experiences and equally moderated by an instructor

In essence and aligned to the current workplace needs. Certainly, transmitting core skills as well as technical skills concurrently to TVE students requires a logical approach of instruction; one that can entrench them simultaneously unlike the usual approaches heavily embraced by the TVE instructors today. Pedagogy such as the Service-learning instruction/programme that has the potentials to effectively and comprehensively meet general teaching and learning needs and capacitate the learners to acquire the most required for taken professional roles, compete anywhere and faced the challenges of the contemporary work place has become necessary for the High school particularly, the TVE.

## **7. Conclusion**

Service–Learning pedagogy has not receives the desired attention that other experiential instructional method such as the internship (student industrial scheme) in most of the TVE training institution particularly in the higher education schools. Yet it offers paramount benefits to the society, the learners (young generations) and the schools that were involved. However, based on the current reality of life in the occupational places, Schools, particularly TVE institutions should not be the only avenue where the younger generations can be given training, community could be involve as a place where students can interact with real life experiences that they may likely come across after their training. This could be an enormously place more than the schools environment as it is conventionally used in other TVE schools especially in developing nations. Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations were made:-

- 1) Consideration should be given to implementing Service-Learning programs/philosophy by encouraging labour/business organizations to support TVE training Institutions.
- 2) National Government particularly in developing Nations through educational ministries should organize and provides professional development training for TVE educators that will bring awareness on the importance of Service-Learning.
- 3) Community and TVE educational School should partner and strategize on the adaptation service-Learning in TVE curriculum by raising their awareness on the relevance importance of Service-Learning.

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