

**UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO**

**Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades**

**Service-learning from the perspective of community partners that work  
with children**

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Tesis de grado presentada como requisito  
para la obtención del título de Magíster en Educación.

Quito, 11 de mayo de 2017

**Universidad San Francisco de Quito**

**Colegio de Postgrados (Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades)**

## **HOJA DE APROBACIÓN DE TESIS**

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## **DEDICATORIA**

Esta tesis se la dedico a mi Dios quién supo guiarme por un buen camino, darme fortaleza para seguir adelante y no desistir ante las dificultades que se han presentado en este tiempo. A mi familia quienes me han motivado y han enseñado a ser más fuerte cada día. Para mi madre por su apoyo incondicional, consejos, comprensión, amor, ayuda en los momentos difíciles. Me ha dado todo lo que soy como persona, mis valores, mis principios, mi carácter, mi empeño, mi perseverancia, mi coraje para conseguir mis objetivos.

## **AGRADECIMIENTOS**

Este trabajo es el final de una etapa llena de sacrificio y a su vez es una puerta de inicio para nuevas experiencias. Agradezco a Dios por todas las bendiciones que me ha dado y porque me ha permitido salir adelante y culminar esta etapa. A mis padres por su esfuerzo, sacrificio, compañía, comprensión e infinito amor. A Karla Díaz y Xavier Almeida quienes han sido excelentes guías en el desarrollo de este trabajo; gracias por su preocupación, tiempo y ayuda incondicional otorgado en todo este tiempo.

## RESUMEN

Este es un estudio cualitativo fenomenológico que se enfoca en la perspectiva sobre la metodología aprendizaje-servicio y su aplicación que tienen los administradores de diferentes organizaciones ubicadas en Quito. Esta investigación analizó el punto de vista de diez participantes quienes trabajan en organizaciones en donde se había aplicado la metodología aprendizaje-servicio. El análisis utilizó el Modelo del Sistema Psico-Ecológico, Teoría de Aprendizaje Experiencial y la Neurociencia enfocada en las emociones.

Los resultados fueron positivos y estos señalaron que (a) las comunidades se sienten satisfechas al participar en estos proyectos y sienten que los estudiantes se han beneficiado de esta experiencia porque han conocido nuevas situaciones y también han creado lazos emocionales con los niños quienes han adquirido confianza en ellos; (b) las comunidades requieren de más ayuda de la que reciben, esto se refiere a recursos humanos y otras contribuciones; (c) los estudiantes deberían recibir más entrenamiento enfocado al lugar en el cual van a aplicar la metodología aprendizaje-servicio.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study focused on the community managers' viewpoints about service-learning methodology and its application in their organizations located in Quito. This research project analyzed ten community managers' views of service-learning projects in their communities. This analysis used Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM), Experiential Learning Theory and Neuroscience focused on emotions.

The findings indicated positive feedback for the achievements thus far and a definite sense that (a) the communities are happy to participate in these projects and feel that students have profited from the experience because they have learned a new reality, because they have learned to bond with the children and they have acquired greater self-assurance; (b) the communities could use a lot more help than they receive currently, not only in human resources, but other contributions; (c) students should be better trained to the particular subject they would be involved in service-learning.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Service-learning is a pedagogical methodology which enables students to apply the knowledge or concepts acquired in class and work within a community (Rhodes & Davis, 2001). This methodology has been widely implemented in higher education institutions in the United States of America and it has become popular across the country (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Service-learning is different from other community engagement programs because it is course-based; that is to say that besides the credit-bearing experience that students acquire, they participate in organized activities which are related to the course material and that also focus on communities' needs (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Moreover, this method is formally evaluated and it focuses on the reflective process, which helps students to comprehend the course content, appreciate the discipline and develop the sense of responsibility; students share, reflect and analyze about their experiences lived in the real communities, these reflection activities can be writing papers, small group discussions or presentations (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Due to the positive outcomes of this methodology, colleges in Europe, Asia, Oceania, Central and South America are implementing it (Annette, 2003). Research has been done about service-learning and the results have documented numerous advantages presented by this methodology (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000). Most of the research in service-learning has been focused on the students, the curriculum and the benefits of the methodology; however, to this date, the impact that service-learning has on the communities has not been widely studied (Cruz & Giles, 2000).

Some countries in Latin America are applying service-learning as an alternative to volunteerism. Service-learning, as mentioned, is a methodology which empowers students to develop some skills; in addition, the students' participation, project preparation and the

reflection in the class and in the communities are main elements during the students' learning process (Donahue, Fenner, & Mitchell, 2015). On the other hand, volunteerism refers to the optional activities that are performed by helpers who provide a specific service or product to the beneficiaries or recipients (Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer, 2015). McBride and Sherraden (2007) stated that these definitions are still miscomprehended and there are several differences between the application of it in the USA and in South America. Tapia (2010) pointed out that due to the increase of service-learning experiences; a considerable amount of research is carried out about the academic structure of this methodology. On the other hand, McBride and Sherraden (2007) affirmed that limited research has been done in Latin America. In Ecuador, there is only one university, which incorporates this program to its curriculum and there is also a lack of information about the impact that it has on the students as well as on the community. It is very important to collect this information in order to analyze the advantages or disadvantages that the beneficiaries have perceived and for a proper application of the program.

## **Background**

**Service-learning history: a short overview.** Service-learning methodology combines academic learning and community service (Furco, 1996). The planned activities must combine both elements in order to engage students to use the concepts or knowledge taught in the classroom and apply on the community (Furco, 1996). Some countries in South American have incorporated service-learning at their universities, but there are still some ideas that need to be reinforced or clarified. The countries that offer service-learning within their institutions are Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela and Uruguay where the class could be mandatory or optional, this decision depends on the institution (McBride & Sherrade, 2007).

According to Bertomeu, González and Latorre (2013) service-learning started to be used at the beginning of 1980. In 2000 the 'Latin-American Center for Learning and Volunteer Service' (Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario, CLAYSS) was created in Buenos Aires, Argentina (González & Latorre, 2013). This organization conducted several research projects about service-learning. Herrero and Tapia (2012) reported that most of the information about service-learning was collected from the United States of America. Although Herrero and Tapia's (2012) compiled some journals about service-learning, they focused on the students, the impact and point of view from students and teachers, methodology and history; therefore, there is a lack of information about the impact that this methodology has on the beneficiaries and community partners; that is to say, there is still no research about what they think or feel of service-learning.

Tapia (2010) has stated that South American countries had already developed some activities in order to help people. These activities were related to education and solidarity, but learning more about service-learning methodology has become an important fact in order to clarify some features or specifications about what students and teachers are doing (Tapia, 2010). In Tapia's study (2010) she focused on what students acquired and developed during the service-learning program they participated in. This study was carried out in Chile and analyzed the impact that a service-learning project had on students working with a community with its wine production (Tapia, 2010). The students were responsible for the analysis of the chemicals, the elaboration process and the compliance with the legal requirements (Tapia, 2010). Students shared many experiences and learned more about the community members and their work; students also acquired several skills and they learned to appreciate their customs (Tapia, 2010); however, there is no mention of the communities' perspective of this program.

In Ecuador, only one university applies service-learning while other institutions use different community engagement methodologies. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature in regards to the community impact after a service-learning intervention.

### **Problem**

Service-learning has been applied in many higher education institutions in the United States and there is an assumption that it enhances students' learning; nonetheless, limited research has been explored about the impact on the community (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Students involved in service-learning have developed positive attitudes according to their teachers. On the other hand, there is a lack of research about the feedback or impact of service-learning on different stakeholders such as: community managers or leaders, employees, parents, target population and the community at large (Bennett, Sunderland, Bartleet & Power, 2016).

Even though positive comments have been made about this methodology, there is also some evidence about this methodology that could affect students or providers, the people who offer help and assistance, as well as beneficiaries or recipients, those people are the ones who receive the help and are part of a community. These recipients also include educational institutions, nurseries, and non-governmental institutions. Carson and Domangue (2013) mentioned in their study that sometimes students' attitude or work is not the most suitable because students feel uncomfortable or think that some community members don't like to communicate with outsiders, or they could be insensitive. Other students commented in their writing journals that they did not like to stay at a particular place because people performed activities that were against their morals or beliefs (Carson & Domangue, 2013). In relation to the beneficiaries, some of them considered that their community was a laboratory because students did not know clearly the activities that they had to perform (Reynolds, 2014). The results from this study must be taken into account because they show the importance of

receiving and analyzing all the beneficiaries' opinions given that they might not agree with all the activities that are performed in their communities.

In order to improve the impact of service-learning interventions, Lester (2015) argued that the collaboration, opinions and work of the administrative personnel are important elements, since they are an integral part of the community, they are the ones who organize processes. Community managers, people that are in charge or manage the institutions, can provide more information: For example, challenges, changes and benefits that have been achieved during the process (Lester, 2015). Community managers' opinions are relevant and essential to assure a more complete evaluation of the impact of a determined service-learning program (Lester, 2015). Thus, the acquisition of information from different beneficiaries, such as community's personnel staff, parents and children or teenagers that attend the community institutions, could be an essential strategy because of the conclusions that could emerge.

As stated before, there is a lack of evidence or information about beneficiaries' feedback related to this process. It can't be assessed whether this is because of a lack of cooperation or a lack of research. Therefore, it is important to collect information from different stakeholders in order to understand their perspectives towards service-learning within their communities. As a result, teachers or coordinators could improve their plans or develop new ones to provide benefits to the students who participate as well as to the beneficiaries.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, three questions examined the impact that service-learning methodology has on the community partners of a particular service-learning program from an Ecuadorian university:

- 1) What is the impact of service-learning interventions on communities that work with children in Quito, Ecuador?
- 2) How do community partners view service-learning within their communities?
- 3) How do community partners perceive this service-learning methodology?

These questions were answered using data interpreted with the Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM) theory and neuroscience concepts, specifically the concept of affective networks.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A significant amount of research has focused on service-learning methodology and its impact on students; nevertheless, there is still research missing about the outcomes, advantages or disadvantages that this methodology has on the community and the beneficiaries; there is not enough evidence in the literature or demonstration of benefits and costs for the community (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Therefore, this study applied the Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM), which incorporates three theories that include the ecological systems model, the biopsychosocial model and contemporary conceptualizations of interaction (Reeb & Folger, 2013). PESM was taken into consideration because it was conceived to guide and inform in the development, application and evaluation of service learning projects, specifically on the outcomes that the ecological environment could have (Reeb & Folger, 2013).

In this research, the most productive theories for the analysis of this research, from the three mentioned, were Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model and Kielser's Biopsychosocial Model. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model focuses on human beings who belong to "interconnected and interdependent systems at different levels of analysis" (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.392). In addition, Reeb y Folger (2013) stated that service-learning applications and their outcomes must occur in any of these systems, which are:

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.392).

Microsystem refers to the individual's role, activities and interpersonal relations that they have with other people in a setting; that setting could be the family: This system also explores how people are shaped or modified (Reeb & Folger, 2013; Kraus, 2008). Mesosystem focuses on "a system of microsystems" which also comprises relationships among two or three settings where the individuals participate, these systems could be between family and work or family and school (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.392). Exosystem refers to one or more settings where several events could occur, these events can or cannot affect the individual who is not always an active participant; in order to exemplify this system, the school board or government' decisions could be considered (Reeb & Folger, 2013). Finally, the macrosystem refers to dominant beliefs, changes, movements, practices; it also includes the consistencies from the three lower-level systems mentioned above (Reeb & Folger, 2013). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner stated that this ecological model shows how human beings' development is related to the environments or settings during their whole lives. (Kraus, 2008).

In the Biopsychosocial Model, Kiesler (2000) presented a matrix of several evaluation factors such as vulnerabilities, risks, resilience, and protective resources. These factors keep an interaction during developmental periods and they influence human beings' physical and mental health (Kiesler, 2000). Regarding vulnerability, it is an internal factor that predisposes an individual --according to the author-- to develop problems such as diabetes; a risk refers to external circumstances such as poverty; resilience refers to an internal factor which involves the power to recover in spite of difficulties (Kiesler, 2000). Protective resources refer to the external factors such as access to health that allows people to have a normal and healthy development (Kiesler, 2000).

According to Cress, Collier and Reitenauer (2005), students involved in service-learning courses increase their social and academic self-concept. Students enhance their

decision making abilities, tolerance and empathy (Cress, Collier & Reitenauer, 2005). Therefore, as some emotions have been appreciated and found on students, positive or negatives emotions could also be found on the beneficiaries during the service-learning implementation. Some research on emotions and learning process state that positive emotions are related to positive outcomes in the areas of mental health, social skills and work (Abe, 2011). Thus, this study explored the relationship between service-learning and neuroscience. It took into account the affective networks such as emotions or feelings the community managers perceive on community members during service-learning implementation.

**Purpose of the study.** The purpose of this study is to analyze the points of view, perspectives or feedback about service-learning applications of community managers. According to the Ecuadorian Council of Higher Education (Consejo de Educación Superior, CES, 2013), all public and private universities must apply community engagement programs in order to help students acquire and develop new skills that could be applied in their academic or professional field. Therefore, this study focused on the service-learning program in effect at San Francisco University of Quito (Universidad de San Francisco de Quito, USFQ). This university has projects in several institutions; however, this study focused only on organizations that work with children in Quito.

**Significance of the study.** As there are few service-learning interventions in Ecuadorian higher education institutions, this study is important to the community and university's administrators so that they may analyze the advantages, disadvantages and impact that this methodology can have on different stakeholders, particularly the community managers involved in the projects. Furthermore, this is one of the first studies conducted in Ecuador about their feedback on the subject of service-learning interventions, as it is applied by one university in Quito. More information on this matter is definitely required and obviously merits many future investigations.



## **Definition of terms**

Service-learning is a pedagogical methodology which enables students to enhance or acquire some skills such as communication, critical thinking, cultural understanding and sense of social justice which they then use in their participation with the community as resources for learning and change (Donahue, Fenner, & Mitchell, 2015). This methodology focuses on students and the community's well-being since they want students to achieve academic goals by means of developing civic responsibility through several projects that the educational centers provide to the students; for example, participation in the community added to reflection in the class (Donahue, Fenner, & Mitchell, 2015). Moreover, one of the objectives of service-learning is to allow students to achieve their learning goals without leaving apart the fulfillment of the communities' interests; it also could reach a long-term impact and commitment, but both parts should work collaboratively to make it a more fulfilling experience (Billig & Waterman, 2003).

In addition, Hunt (2010) highlights that this methodology should develop a curriculum which takes into consideration the community and its needs, it should last a period of time, and the participants, students and beneficiaries, should be assisted through the performance of different activities which allow them to express how they feel.

Hensley (2009) stated that in order to choose the place to serve, the students should get to know the community needs and the place that their project would occupy. Before making a decision, students should have visited several places to have more options; once the student has already chosen one, the class instructors or teachers should explain to the community manager the course goals and what they expect from students to learn and do (Hensley, 2009). It is recommended that students work in the communities at least two hours in a week and teachers must keep contact with the community managers in order to track

students' work progress and clarify any doubts the leaders might have about the program (Hensley, 2009)

**Volunteerism**, as the term conveys, refers to the performance of voluntary activities that are not mandatory: there is no type of coercion involved or benefits for the helper, as a specific service or product is provided to the beneficiaries (Whittaker, McLennan & Handmer, 2015).

**Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM)** is a conceptual framework which integrates the ecological systems model, the Biopsychosocial model, and current conceptualizations of interaction (Reeb & Folger, 2013). This model allows to guide and inform the “development, implementation, and evaluation of service-learning projects” (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.396).

PESM incorporates the principles of equifinality and multifinality. The principle of equifinality maintains that different pathways can eventuate similar outcomes. The principle of multifinality holds that the influence of any given factor is moderated by a constellation or internal factors (e.g., vulnerabilities and resiliencies), external factors (e.g., risks and protective resources), and developmental factors (e.g., sensitive periods, tasks or demands of different developmental periods), such that various outcomes may eventuate. (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.395). “According to the PESM, community members are nested within, and influenced by, hierarchically arranged systems at different levels of analysis.” (Reeb & Folger, 2013, p.395)

**Neuroscience** focuses on the study of the brain; although this term was first used in 1970, several researchers had investigated about the nervous system and other disciplines such as medicine, biology psychology, which nowadays neuroscience concentrates on (Bear, Connors & Paradiso, 2016).

Neuroscience is a group of multidisciplinary sciences that analyze nervous system to the biological basis for behavior. Neuroscience's scope focuses from molecular biology of nerve cells to biological basis of behavior, emotions and cognition (Squire et al., 2008).

### **Assumptions**

There are some assumptions about this research. The fact that the researcher studies at the university subject of the investigation, and which provides the methodology, it is assumed that possibly the interviewees or community partners, beneficiaries might omit some important details or important facts. Furthermore, and for the same reason, some participants may avoid participating in the research.

There is also de fact that nowhere in the research was there a reference to any other institution of higher learning using this methodology. It is safe to assume, therefore, that Universidad San Francisco de Quito is the only institution in Ecuador using it. Although the research did not specifically focus on the participation of the authorities of the University in this endeavor, it can also be assumed, by the results, that they are fully informed and the projects have their backing. The question remains, because it had no bearing on the research for this thesis, as to whether other Schools in the University are aware of this very productive methodology for community outreach programs.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents some information mainly from academic journals and some additional information from books. This information focuses on the background of service-learning, students and communities' perspective, affective networks and how this methodology is implemented in the United States of America, Latin-America and Ecuador.

### **Genres Included in the Literature Review**

**Sources.** The information has been collected from different journals and books. At first, the list of references were taken from the journals or books related to the topic. The literature was searched using different internet search engines from the USFQ University and in the public domain; for example: EBSCO, SPRINGER, ELSERVIER, ERIC, PROQUEST, Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, and Sage. Some of these journals are peer reviewed and some books focused merely on the service-learning methodology and its background.

### **Steps for the Literature Review Process**

A brainstorming process was followed to analyze the topic of about service-learning. The first step was to look up definitions and methodology in different journals whose bibliography provided more sources or authors. Their work was related to the impact of service-learning in different places such as in the United States and around the world. As a second step, other journals provided more subtopics and references which allowed the researcher to find additional information about service-learning methodology. All these journals and books can be found on the Internet, some of them are found by using the 'doi' (digital object identifier) or names of the studies.

## **Literature Review Format**

In the literature review below, the information is divided into four different subtopics. In the first place there is a review of the background, history and important facts about service-learning in the United States and in South America. This literature review does not focus on European or Asian countries because that is out of the scope of the study. In the second place, this study focuses on the impact this methodology has on students. Third, the investigation focuses on the impact that service-learning has on the communities or beneficiaries. And finally, it highlights the background of the application of service-learning and its implementation in Ecuador.

### **Service-learning Background in the United States of America and in South America**

Service-learning is widely used in many higher education institutions across the United States (Blouin & Perry, 2009). This methodology has been promoted by non-governmental organizations and schools. In 1960, universities and US colleges became the leaders in implementing service-learning (Tapia, 2007). This methodology has been analyzed by many organizations and universities: the organizations that are concerned about it, want to include service-learning opportunities because they desire to combine education and service (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). There are some organizations which focus on service-learning and community engagement programs: the best known are 'Campus Compact, Council for Adult Experiential Learning', 'National Youth Leadership Council', 'Partnership for Service-Learning' and the 'American Association for Higher Education' (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Several universities have researched service-learning in order to incorporate it into their curriculum. One of the results and reasons for implementing service-learning in education is the view that students need the personal contact and interactions with different human groups which can be acquired through the service activities performed within the communities (Wilson, 2011). An example of interest and in-depth research about service-

learning was carried out by a university located in Indiana, it explored diverse resources and hired prepared personnel in order to create an Office of Service-Learning in that campus (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Campus Compact is an organization that has more than 1,100 college and university members that represent students who are responsible for promoting service-learning and community service in higher education (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014). According to Campus Compact (2011) from 2009 to 2010 thirty five percent of students registered at schools that belong to this organization participated in service-learning programs. In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that most of the public high schools in the United States are already applying service-learning within their curriculum (Billig & Waterman, 2003).

During George Bush's administration, financial support was provided to education institutions that offered service-learning opportunities (Johnson & Notah, 1999). Another president who sponsored service-learning was Bill Clinton who offered financial support to students who collaborated in these projects and the only condition was to be at least 16 years old (Johnson & Notah, 1999). Performing service-learning activities and doing research about this topic are not inexpensive; for that reason, other institutions receive financing from state education departments or the Corporation for National Service (Johnson & Notah, 1999).

The Corporation for National Service (CNNS, 2017) was created twenty years ago in the United States of America. This corporation has worked with several partners in different communities and it has worked with approximately five million Americans who have done service hours. In order to support all the projects and provide necessary help, President Barack Obama stated that the budget for this corporation in 2017 was 1.1 billion (CNNS, 2017). This amount is distributed in different ways to different funds; for example,

AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Social Innovation; it is also used for administrative expenses (CNNS, 2017).

**Service-learning Methodology and Experiential Learning Theory.** Service-learning is a methodology that has been associated with learning theories such as “experiential learning” theory developed by John Dewey and David Kolb (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014). In spite of this theory’s disbelief and critiques, Kolb (2015) stated that several educational institutions offer experiential education on activities such as internships or field projects; however, he highlighted that this theory is really applied on activities; for example, service-learning, problem-based and action learning. In addition, Kolb (1984) emphasized that the name of this theory is due to the importance that experience plays in the learning process and because its origins, that refers to the experiential work of John Dewey and other authors.

John Dewey’s learning theory focused on inquiry, experience and reflection which are key elements in service-learning and ‘learn-by-doing’ methodology (Giles & Eyer, 1994). Additionally, this theory was applied because, according to John Dewey’s philosophy (1938), education should be considered a social process and human experience is essential in the learning process because it involves communication and contact with people in a community. Dewey’s definition of education is:

The reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience.

The increment of meaning corresponds to the increased perception of the connections of the activities in which we are engaged. (Dewey, 1916, pp. 82-83)

Although John Dewey did not mention the term-service learning on his research, Saltmarsh (1996) stated that Dewey’s writings were related to the concept of this methodology because he analyzed five specific areas that are: The relationship between

education and experience, a democratic community, social service reflection and the role of education on the social transformation.

Dewey's definition entails several elements such as thinking, feeling and experiencing that support service-learning methodology. Similarly, Kolb (2015) claimed that another important element in the learning process was inquiry because people are natural inquirers and they can learn from experience. Kolb (1984) defined the experiential learning theory as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

As most of these areas are related to service-learning methodology, they are explained briefly. Taking into account the education and experience, Dewey (1932) connected some elements such as practice and theory, knowledge and understanding. Dewey (1932) stated that these connections were important because all of them are part of the learning process which should be active and the learners should be inquirers (1932). Regarding service, John Dewey (1908) mentioned that the most important step is to destroy and eliminate any kind of barrier between individuals and a community. Reflective inquiry is one of the most important areas that is completely related to the service-learning methodology and it is also essential for the experiential learning theory.

According to Dewey (1916) not all the activities provide experience; in other words, the activities that could be done must be challenging or provide opportunities to problem solve. Reflection is the kind of thinking that allows an individual to analyze information and experiences and their possible implications (Dewey, 1916). In relation to the education for social transformation, Dewey (1916) stated that education is not the only system that could change society; however, it is an important element that could make people be aware and work for others' welfare instead of focusing only on individual benefit.



In relation to Kolb's experiential theory, this model shows four different modes for learning. The first two modes refer to the acquisition of knowledge that is by Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC); the other two modes regard the transformation of experience by means of Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE) (Kolb, 1984). Then, the experiential learning theory is a process which incorporates the four learning modes. It is considered an idealized learning cycle where the learner gets through all the modes (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

**Service-learning Methodology in Latin America.** Although most of the information about service-learning methodology or research has been done in the United States, this methodology is not restricted to any one country: actually students from different countries could have this experience because it is also offered in study abroad programs (Cabtree, 2008).

According to Tapia (2007), French style learning ideology has had a great influence on Latin American educational systems: This system focuses more on rational knowledge rather than in empirical experiences. Consequently, activities linked to community service have not been appreciated as important events on students' learning process; consequently, service-learning has been given less importance and it is optional in some countries (Tapia, 2007). In Latin America some countries have promoted and implemented service-learning; for example, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Dominican Republic and Bolivia (Tapia, 2007).

According to Tapia (2007) service-learning has been promoted in Argentina since 1997. The best projects are rewarded by the government in order to encourage educational institutions to improve their programs and to make teachers and students feel more committed to this activity (Tapia, 2007). Service-learning has been implemented by approximately 5,000 schools and hundreds of universities in Argentina (Tapia & Mallea,

2003). Despite the crisis that Argentina faced in the past years, service-learning has been employed and it has helped schools to find balance because parents and teachers focus on social needs and on improving educational quality (Tapia & Mallea, 2003).

The Latin American Centre for Service-Learning (CLAYSS) is a non-governmental organization created in 2002 in Argentina (Tapia & Mallea, 2003). Its main goal is to promote service-learning in Latin America so that education institutions can collaborate with diverse projects in different contexts considering the community needs (Tapia, Amar, Montes, Tapia & Yaber, 2013). This organization works with people from several places from Latin America for instance Uruguay and Brazil, but it also works with organizations from other continents; for example, Africa and Europe (Tapia et al., 2013).

Some of the goals that CLAYSS wants to achieve are to promote service-learning methodology, to train coordinators, teachers and students from different communities or organizations which help through community work programs, and to provide assistance in the service-learning programs that are applied on schools, high schools, universities or organizations (CLAYSS, 2017).

In addition, the Chilean Ministry of Education has promoted the use of service-learning since 2000 (Tapia, 2007). At the beginning, the purpose of this methodology was to reduce school dropout rates because students quitted school and control was required (Tapia, 2007). 'Liceo para todos' is a program that provided some scholarships, which were donated by the Ministry, to students who did not have enough financial resources; the purpose of this program was to make students finish their studies instead of working at an early age (Marshall, 2004). Although most of the scholarship holders did not drop out, there was evidence that one of three students did because they had problems with some subjects (Marshall, 2004). Then, they decided to provide extra help such as tutoring sessions with students pursuing a major in education. The college students worked with teenagers at

schools after classes and the results included a raise in their grades, better understand of the course contents and a reduction in the dropout rate (Marshall, 2004).

Service-learning is also implemented in Brazil and it is sponsored by several non-governmental organizations (Tapia, 2007). In Uruguay, service-learning was first promoted by secondary private schools but later other education institutions incorporated this methodology (Tapia, 2007). Finally, in Bolivia this methodology is promoted by Centro Boliviano de Filantropia (CEBOFIL) which also provides assistance and training.

As it has been stated, service-learning is not limited to be implemented only in one country, actually several countries from different parts of the world are implementing it due to its benefits. However, some countries that are applying have not researched its impact on the students or the community partners.

### **Service-learning and its Impact on Students**

There are several studies that have presented positive and negative impact of service-learning on students. For example, the possible impact on students who acquired and developed new skills and knowledge; and the negative side, the hazard of experiencing a negative environments in the communities. Service-learning has been implemented because of the benefits and positive results far outweigh the negative results and research has demonstrated this fact (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000). For instance, the research states positive outcomes on academic performance, students' commitment and sometimes it has been evidenced that students want to continue participating after they finish serving in the communities (Astin et al., 2000).

In order for service-learning to have a positive impact on students, its goals should be presented clearly because students need to know the context of the program, the requirements and the activities that they will do and once it is clarified, students might have a better idea and they might have the corresponding commitment (Dienhart et al., 2016). Moreover,

Carson and Domangue (2013) stated that students should know all the positive and negative elements that they have to face in the community, they should also be given time to know the place and realize how the environment is in order to avoid any complication or misunderstanding.

Service-learning is a methodology which allows students to appreciate the community needs in a different way and develop a profound relationship with the people they work with. Students must be motivated and committed because they contribute with their time, effort, dedication and resources in order to accomplish the communities' goals (Lester, 2015). Furthermore, these experiences can be positive if the students feel attracted and excited about the project. If the activities become challenging, this methodology provides several opportunities for students such as acquiring or developing leadership skills and personal growth (Lester, 2015). Students become part of a community so they have to face the community needs and they can reflect upon different realities. Students acquire and develop new skills, enhance their motivation, learn different teaching techniques and acquire real world experiences as results of their service-learning projects (Lester, 2015).

According to Lester (2015), students' reflections in an academic setting about their service-learning experiences gave insight on students' personal and professional growth. The results of Lester's study highlighted that students enjoyed working with the community partners, they gained leadership experience, and they were able to gain experience in a real-world environment (Lester, 2015). On the other hand, according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, these elements could be evaluated in the microsystem because the students' skills, activities and interpersonal relations develop in a particular setting that could be related to their service-learning placement (Reeb & Folger, 2013). In both instances the emphasis is on the personal growth aspects of the participating students.

Extensive research has been done about the impact that service-learning has on students. Pelco, Ball and Lockeman (2014) compiled some studies which present students' reflections and experiences. These studies pointed out that some of the opportunities and benefits of this methodology are connecting personal values with academics, expanding self-awareness and analyzing the features characteristics that students share with people from the communities. In their study at the Virginia Commonwealth University, most of the students highlighted that they have noticed some improvements in relation to their academic growth (Pelco, Ball & Lockeman, 2014). Most of the participants considered their service-learning course as a positive experience because they experienced personal growth in the academic and professional fields; students also emphasized the positive impact regarding that they were immersed in different projects of a great variety of disciplines such as biology, business, nursing, etc. (Pelco, Ball & Lockeman, 2014).

**Service-learning and Emotions.** In relation to the emotional component of service-learning on the students, there is some research about it which presented positive as well as negative impact. Emotions are essential in several activities and contexts, emotions can influence teachers and students' decisions, behavior and performance (Denzin, 2007). According to Carson and Domangue (2013), there could be positive and negative feelings that students can experience during their service hours in the communities. These feelings can be anger, frustration, happiness, gratitude or shame, among others. Although only two studies have focused on the emotional component of service-learning (Carson & Domangue, 2013), they have provided enough information for future research. When this methodology is implemented, emotions can have a significant influence on students' commitment and it could affect their academic and interpersonal skills or leadership ability (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

**Service-learning and its positive impact on students.** Taking into account Carson and Domangue's study (2013), students experience multiple emotional states like motivation and perseverance and negative feelings. Students feel excitement and gratitude and they declared that their excitement was produced when they helped people and when they realized the values that community members have such as hope and resiliency in spite of their everyday obstacles (Carson & Domangue, 2013). In relation to gratitude, students may feel it when they share time with community members and realize their living conditions, so students are able to reflect about all the opportunities and goods that they have in their daily lives (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

Furthermore, Wilson (2011) stated that this methodology is considered effective because students are required to perform several activities such as meaningful work which implies responsibilities and challenging tasks. Also, the author considered that students learned from the community members as a consequence, there are cognitive and affective changes (Wilson, 2011). In addition, Wilson (2011) pointed out that a service-learning intervention could promote the development of empathy through face-to-face interactions that students have with the community members who are from diverse racial, economic and social backgrounds.

Wilson's study (2011) considered empathy as a key element which is developed due to the interaction that students had with community members because they dealt with several topics such as problems or obstacles that the community members have overcome. Once students realized those problems, they felt identified with some of the community members or with their issues. They created bonds; students understood the complex issues and developed new perspectives about social problems (Wilson, 2011). Other positive outcome from students' reflections is that they questioned their prejudices and stereotypes (Wilson,

2011). Also, they pointed out positive changes and how they were able to be part of the solution of social problems (Wilson, 2011).

**Service-learning and its negative impact on students.** Service-learning can also have a negative impact on students. For example, some students could feel adverse feelings such as anger and frustration that are considered hazards. These emotions can be experienced due to several reasons; for example, students do not agree with the community members because they have different beliefs, values or rules. That is why they could feel angry or disappointed because they don't share the same points of view (Carson & Domangue, 2013). Also, students could feel anger or frustration when the program does not meet their expectations or if the program is disorganized and they cannot achieve the objectives or do the required activities (Carson & Domangue, 2013). Finally, students can feel anger when the situations that occur in the community are against their beliefs or morals; however, they cannot do anything because they realize that they have to serve and help instead of judging (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

Chupp and Joseph (2010) stated other negative elements. For example, when students do not have clear outcomes or activities to perform, service-learning could be regarded as charity work which reinforces paternalism. Some students cannot contribute actively in the communities because they have a sense of superiority or they blame people instead of feeling empathy (Boyle, 2007). In order to avoid a negative experience, teachers must prepare students in a proper way and make use of constant reflection to analyze the challenges that could come up during this process (Chupp and Joseph, 2010).

### **Service-learning and Community Partners' Perspective**

Community managers and beneficiaries' perspectives need to be acknowledged in order to recognize their feelings and perspectives about the impact of the service-methodology. Some studies have been carried out about it; however, insufficient research has

been done about it around the world. Most of the research has focused on universities and students (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Nevertheless, research needs to focus on community impact taking into consideration the perspectives of the community participants, the leaders of the organizations and other members (Cuban & Anderson, 2007).

Some studies have analyzed the community members' points of view in order to understand their experiences and perspective about service-learning. There are positive as well as negative impact that are perceived by the community members. Vernon and Foster (2002) stated in their study that community representatives emphasized the good relation and connection that students had with the community members, students became role models and helped teenagers improve their academic performance and raised teenagers' self-esteem.

**Service-learning and its positive impact on the communities.** Blouin and Perry (2009) analyzed a community and found out that students were considered very useful because they provided focused assistance to their work. Also, what students did was regarded as an additional directed help in the communities since their work improved the services and the activities that the community members already did. A community leader expressed gratitude since students helped with new ideas and with the creation of new projects and their time was well appreciated by the community (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

Another study by Reynolds (2014) focused on community organization residents and representatives' perspectives about service-learning. This study was done in Nicaragua and the community members provided feedback about the positive impact that service-learning had on their communities. Community members expressed they have more confidence and a higher sense of pride about themselves after the service-learning intervention (Reynolds, 2014).

Although there is not much research on the subject, results seem to indicate there is a lot of confidence in the community leaders, and so they stated in their interviews that



students' presence and participation motivated them to work in a better way (Reynolds, 2009). Also, they considered that students became role models who taught them to achieve their goals. They stated this because in spite of the distance, students could get the help and resources for the communities (Reynolds, 2014). In addition, residents emphasized that having contact with people from different places allowed them to create bonds and realize the opportunities that they have in their lives (Reynolds, 2014).

Community residents highlighted that the students' visits motivated them because their community was in a remote rural village (Reynolds, 2014). Also, they appreciated that despite the distance students had the commitment and motivation to visit them which made community residents feel important (Reynolds, 2014). Moreover, students' presence developed a suitable environment because they appreciated the community members' work and knowledge. Also everyone interacted as equals instead of having a sense of superiority which made residents feel comfortable (Reynolds, 2014).

**Service-learning and its negative impact on the communities.** There could also be a negative impact of service-learning on the community partners. Some community residents might not feel pleased because they think that their living environment has become a laboratory (Reynolds, 2014). Residents could have this perspective when the results are not the expected ones or when they realize that some students do not have the proper guidance and they focus on different or unplanned events. Reynolds (2014) stated that when students do not have a clear idea from the beginning of the program, they can treat the community as a laboratory because they do not have enough knowledge or experience when they have to make decisions.

Another negative impact that this methodology could have on the community is specifically with children in poor communities. Eby (1998) stated that students developed relationships with children; nonetheless, once the time is over, the relationship ends, which

could cause distress because children become attached to the students. The same phenomenon has been observed when analyzing volunteer work.

In addition, when students are not prepared to work on these programs, there could be a lack of commitment which could lead to a problematic situation because the community members could feel disappointed (Vernon and Foster, 2002). Stoecker and Tryon (2009) considered that teachers and administrators from education institutions must consider the voices, feedback and comments from the community members when planning service-learning programs. Stoecker and Tryon's study (2009) presented how community administrators complain about the assistance that the community members receive so that they prefer to avoid having students in their communities.

Service-learning could have a positive or negative impact. The community partners and community members' perspectives are still underrepresented in the literature. There is a lack of in-depth research about the challenges, benefits and complaints that are a result of service-learning programs (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

### **Service-learning in Ecuador**

In Ecuador there is an institution which is responsible for planning, regulating and coordinating several requirements and laws for all universities: this institution is the Ecuadorian Council for Higher Education (CES). This organization works with other governmental entities in order to evaluate higher education institutions, programs, curriculum and the quality of education from both public and private institutions (CES, 2017). In relation to community engagement, CES states that all Ecuadorian universities must focus on the students' academic and professional growth, they need to work on scientific, technological and social research; also, they must work on community engagement (CES, 2013).

According to Orozco and Astudillo (2015) community engagement is essential in order to recognize the interests and needs that families have. Students from higher education

institutions need to use all the resources and share with people from different communities; teaching and research are key elements in the community engagement programs (Orozco & Astudillo, 2015).

Even though all the universities need a community engagement program, they have implemented different programs. Some universities in Quito have community engagement programs, but they vary in the number of hours or how students are involved. For example, the Catholic University, Quito, (PUCE in Spanish) implements a program in which students do a variety of activities. Students are able to develop some skills and acquire knowledge about the Ecuadorian context and social issues (PUCE, 2017). The Salesian Polytechnic University (Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, UPS) implements community engagement programs that focus on community needs; students can do internships, projects related to religion or culture in public or private organizations (UPS, 2017).

Ecuador's Central University (Universidad Central del Ecuador, UCE, 2017) also promotes community engagement programs that are coordinated with the different departments. In addition, internships and community projects are taken into account in this program, there are around 560 hours that students must complete (UCE, 2017). Finally, Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) uses the service-learning model as part of its General Education Program. Every student has to take a service-learning course in order to graduate (USFQ, 2017).

No evidence can be found of research on service-learning in the Ecuadorian context. There is a lack of information about the impact that service-learning has on students and on the community members. In relation to Latin America, even though some countries are applying it, they have not presented any study or research about its impact.

**Service-learning and Psycho-ecological Systems Model.** There is not enough evidence of the different outcomes in the community managers' feedback, about service-

learning implementation in Ecuador. The purpose of this research is to obtain qualitative information that will be analyzed using the Psycho-Ecological System Model (PESM) theory of development which allows the researcher to evaluate the implementation of this program (Reeb & Folger, 2013). As it has been mentioned, this model incorporates three theoretical models: the ecological systems model, the biopsychosocial model and a contemporary conceptualization of interaction (Reeb & Folger, 2013). Regarding this study, the ecological systems model by Bronfenbrenner is used to apply the four systems or levels of analysis he proposed; the biopsychosocial model is considered because it studied internal and external factors that may affect individuals' health and welfare (Reeb & Folger, 2013).

The ecological systems model is necessary to assess the community problems, the relation to service-learning projects, and the possible community benefits within their own systems (Reeb & Folger, 2013). Because of their definitive importance, this study focused on microsystem and exosystem which best serve to analyze the evidence presented.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study tries to answer three questions by examining the impact that service-learning methodology has on the community. The questions are:

- (1) What is the impact of service-learning interventions on communities that work with children in Quito, Ecuador?
- (2) How do community partners perceive the service-learning methodology?
- (3) How do community partners view service-learning within their communities?

These questions are answered by taking into account the Psycho-Ecological Systems Model (PESM), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model was taken into consideration because it focused on several systems from micro to macro, and it analyzed the relation among these systems. Also the questions are answered by analyzing the connection with neuroscience, specifically in regards to the affective networks because the participants were human beings who can provide their perspective or evidence about children or students' behavior and emotional affection with others.

These questions start from a premise that service-learning methodology needs to be investigated on its impact and how community leaders perceive the implementation of this methodology in their institutions. Thus, a qualitative study was conducted which consisted of in-depth interviews with ten different community partners who work with children. Therefore, the research questions were designed to analyze the phenomenon in a deeper way, it also required to collect information such as feedback, opinions and suggestions.

#### **Justification for the Selected Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore in a deeper way the perspective that leaders of different organizations had about service-learning. This kind of study allowed the researcher to identify and realize human experiences regarding the

phenomenon, as described by the participants (Creswell, 2003). A qualitative research was the most suitable means to answer these questions because the researcher could collect enough information from the interviews.

### **Data Collection Strategy**

The tool used in the research was an in-depth face-to-face interview with ten participants. The interview was used for this study because it is considered a “basic mode of inquiry” (Seidman, 2013, p.8). The purpose of this tool is to understand and comprehend the experience of other people and what that experience means to them (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, during the interviews, the participants provided different perspectives about the implementation of service-learning within their workplaces.

Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions that were answered by the participants and their responses were recorded in a cell phone (See Appendix 1). The interview lasted from ten to twenty minutes, the participants provided as much information and details as possible in order to clarify the impact that service-learning had on their communities.

### **Participants**

There is only one private university in Ecuador that applies the service-learning methodology. This study was based on the experience of this particular higher education institution. The ten adults who participated were chosen to represent different institutions, where they work. This research study was focused on organizations in Quito, Ecuador that worked only with children and young adults.

**Sampling.** The ten participants were the managers or responsible for their institution and for service-learning implementation. In addition, these individuals could observe both the children and the students who applied the methodology: They provided all their perspective and feedback on the basis of what they have observed.

**Gender. Participants were** a heterogeneous group in terms of their age and gender. There were eight women and two men interviewed at their work place.

**Socioeconomic level.** The socioeconomic level of the community managers has no bearing on this investigation and it can be stated that they worked with the children that belonged to a low socioeconomic level. Most of these organizations require donations from diverse organizations in order to pay for the teachers and administrative staff.

**Special features related to the research.** All the participants worked at organizations that help children who live in vulnerable living conditions or children who have special needs.

### **Setting**

The organizations were located in Quito, Ecuador in different parts of the city. Most of them were located in the north of Quito. These organizations were public schools, community centers, childcare facilities and physical rehabilitation centers.

### **Researcher's role**

The researcher was the interviewer during the data collection. One must not ignore the problem of the bias that interviewees may have had during their participation, they could have omitted some details for the investigation. Prior to the interviews, the researcher informed the participants about the 'Informed Consent' requirement and obtained their signature on the forms, to guarantee the protection of their privacy and rights.

### **Ethical considerations**

Taking into consideration that this research required to contact with human beings, the university Institutional Review Board approved the research and the informed consent prior to its implementation. Therefore, the participants were advised about the informed consent which was explained in detail as well as other information about the investigation. The interviewees participated voluntarily and signed the informed consent. The researcher

explained to them the possible risks that they might be exposed to and possible feelings of discomfort when sharing information about their programs and their perspectives on service-learning.

Given that the researcher was a student at the same university that provided service-learning assistance to the communities, it was thought that the participants might feel intimidated on making some negative comments because they could possibly assume that those comments could damage the agreement that their organization has with the university. Therefore, the researcher insistently clarified the need for all the participants to provide their honest perspectives and explain that there would not be any kind of bias related to the university or an impact on their relationships thereof.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

To collect data, an in-depth interview was used with all the participants. First, the researcher set an appointment with each of the community managers at their work places. During the phone call, the researcher provided enough information about the investigation in order to clarify the purpose and what was required from the participants.

The day of the appointment, the researcher shared more details about the investigation and the informed consent was also explained and given to the participants. All of them agreed with the investigation and the interview. Consequently, they signed the informed consent (See Appendix 1) to confirm that they wanted to participate in the investigation and that all the information that they would provide would be confidential and that their participation was voluntary.



## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

### Analysis

During this qualitative research, ten open-ended interviews were conducted at the participants' work places. The interviewees responded to six different questions related to the impact that service-learning programs have had on their institutions and communities. The leaders or managers of the institutions were the ones that responded to the questions.

Once the data was collected, the researcher performed the following activities. In the first place, the researcher transcribed all the information that had been recorded in the interviews. The program 'oTranscribe' was used to transcribe in an easy and fast way all the information; this program is free of charge. Once the file was uploaded into the program, the researcher started to listen to the information and made notes on a word processing document. The advantages of this program is that by using some keyboards buttons, the researcher could lower or hasten the speed of the voice record, also there were other buttons which allowed to pause, move forward or behind. Working with this tool was fast and it did not take too much time.

Then, to validate the information and make sure that all the material was on the transcriptions, all the recordings were read and compared with the original file. In addition, the researcher read carefully all the transcriptions because it was important to have a general idea of what participants said or commented (Creswell, 2003).

Due to the fact that open-ended data requires a deep analysis development and continual reflection (Creswell, 2003), after transcribing and analyzing the information, the data was coded; this activity was a hand-codification. By encoding, the material gets organized into 'chunks' (Creswell, 2003). It involves analyzing a text, images or audiovisual materials to assign them to categories that have been previously labeled. In this particular

case, the encoding term was derived from the actual words of the interviewees in process called 'in vivo' or 'live coding' (Creswell, 2003).

In order to code the data, Creswell (2003) mentioned eight steps which require analysis. These steps include: getting a general idea from all the data, analyzing the most interesting or the shortest transcription, make a list of the possible topics and separate the ones that are not relevant, abbreviate the topics, find the most suitable word for the code, review the codes and their abbreviations, analyze the information and only if it is necessary, it is recommended to recode the data that was already categorized (Creswell, 2003). In order to analyze and code the data in this investigation, the researcher found some key describing words in the first interview, which were used as codes. At first, thirty four codes were found; however, it was required to refine the data, so that the final result was only twenty four different codes, which were identified on the document. After analyzing the data and the codes, there were five possible thematic categories which encompass some codes. These thematic categories (See Appendix 2) are:

Thematic category 1: The permanent requirement of assistance. At first, interviewees stated that due to the fact that the communities or organizations do not receive a great amount of incomes and they help children who do not have enough economical resources, they need a lot of help in these places. As managers they want to provide a good treatment and what children do not have at home; therefore, any kind of help is welcome such as donations, when it's possible and human resources. Managers as well as personnel staff have several activities to perform in the communities; then, people who serve or collaborate are important.

Thematic category 2: Service-learning program outcomes in the community. The describing keyword about service-learning program was its positive impact on the communities. In addition, participants have manifested that a possible outcome from service-learning application is a mutual benefit because students as well as children, parents,

managers and personnel staff are helped and they are able to learn something new in relation to skills, knowledge or emotions. Also, it was stated that due to its positive impact, there was not found any kind of risk or recommendation. Other codes that were assigned in this thematic category were the goals achievement; that is to say, specifically managers helped beneficiaries, who were children, to accomplish a variety of goals in a personal and academic field. Finally, it also embraced the agreement that communities have with PASEC.

Thematic category 3: Possible service-learning challenges and recommendations. This category included some keywords that were mentioned during the interviews which were evidence of restrictions and challenges and possible recommendations in order to improve the service-learning experience or its application in the communities.

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement and work in the community. Since participants mentioned that students performed several activities, they stated the importance of students' reflection upon reality because of the different backgrounds that they could see. Also, the proactivity that some students had during the work that they performed in the organizations. Some skills and knowledge acquisition were key words codes and they were assigned in this category because it focused merely on students.

Thematic category 5: Students and community partners' bonds. It regards to the relationship between students and community partners, specifically children. Therefore, some elements were considered in this category such as engagement with children, collaboration after service-learning application, the emotional element between students and children and also how students can promote advertisement of the organization in the society.

The researcher proposed six questions that were central questions. According to Creswell (2003) these questions are examined in the study in a general form in order to avoid limits on the answers or limits on inquiry. After these questions were answered, the researcher analyzed the most suitable thematic categories.

### **Research question 1**

The first research question presented, was ‘What is the impact of service-learning methodology in the institution?’ The purpose of this question was to determine how the community managers perceive the application of service-learning programs in their institutions. Then, four of the thematic categories were associated with this question. The categories were: the permanent requirement of assistance, service-learning program outcomes in the community, possible service-learning challenges and recommendations and students’ engagement and work in the community. These four categories were into consideration because of the participants’ answers. Their viewpoints focused on several topics instead of emphasizing only on the research question.

Thematic category 1: the permanent requirement of assistance. All of these institutions require a variety of resources. Therefore, three participants stated that getting personnel resources would allow them to achieve some goals and cover some needs. For example, an interviewee mentioned that: “Due to the fact that we are an organization that requires collaboration and it is used with the children that we work with, all help is welcome” (translated by author). In addition, another participant shared that: “sometimes the personnel staff and even some volunteers ask if there aren’t other volunteers or extra help” another one commented that: “since there are missing volunteers, we tell other people that we are going to look for them, we are going to find them” (translated by author). Finally, another participant also mentioned: “we do care about people’s contribution and help, so the people may come to help us and it’s important if they can do it for a long period of time” (translated by author).

When using Kiesler’s Biopsychosocial model (2000), there are some risks that are the external circumstances that can affect or influence the human beings’ physical or mental health. This thematic category summarizes the external risk of poverty, which can affect

children's welfare. The requirement of economic or human resources is clear in order to provide the required help in these institutions.

Thematic category 2: service-learning program outcomes in the community. Resulting from RQ1, this thematic category was found in the transcriptions because all of the ten participants mentioned the outcome that service-learning application had on their communities. The additional student help in the project lightens the load on the members of the teaching community and introduces a welcomed diversity for the children. All of the ten participants stated their gratitude and provided valuable input about the service-learning program. All of them stated that the impact that these program has been positive. A participant mentioned: "since we are an institution which provides social assistance, the service-learning program helps us a lot because we do not have enough personnel staff to accomplish the work that we have to do here" (translated by author). Similarly, an interviewee clarified: "it is positive because the students help us to do several activities in the institution and we are pretty grateful because of the aid that they provide" (translated by author). Another participant exemplified that: "it is positive because each child needs assistance in their homework and we should take into account that their socio-economic background is not a high one, so students help us a lot" (translated by author). Likewise, another community manager illustrated that in the institution that helps children and teenagers who suffer different physical problems or mental retardation:

The impact is 100% good because sometimes in a class of 16 students, at least one of them requires face-to-face attention and sometimes when two people are in the class, they can complete the work, but it is better in relation to the attention that they provide to the children (translated by author).

Other participants also stated that the impact is extremely positive, but one of them mentioned this fact and mutual benefit:

It is positive, I would say that it is positive for all of us because we try to put ourselves in mothers and professionals' shoes, and we think that the only way that we can make students sensitive is by sharing these experiences (translated by author).

In addition, an interviewee clarified: "we saw great improvement, we give children all the materials, and students have helped us tremendously with that, homework and library".

RQ1 is the main question in this research because the main purpose was to know the impact that service-learning had on the communities. Furthermore, all of the ten participants' answers stated that it has been a positive experience: The resources provided in the cooperation project have had a wonderful impact on the quality of the children's homework, performance and reading skills. The interviewees considered several elements such as students' participation, how their work contributed to their organization, how children were helped and the improvement that community managers have perceived.

Thematic category 3: Possible service-learning challenges and recommendations, for the university and the students involved in service-learning. This category also was found in the first question because a participant mentioned the improvements that could be made to the development of the program:

Despite service-learning positive impact, it could be better, and there could be more impact if there weren't some boundaries or limits imposed by the university; also, I would have more freedom in order to carry out more programs or activities with the students if these limits were not there (translated by author).

Even though there was a specific question to analyze the possible challenges or recommendations, a participant contrasted the positive impact and its possible challenge that was perceived during service-learning application.

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement and work in the community. Two participants talked about important outcomes that students may have as well as the

community. They considered the proactivity and the reflection upon real situations that students face in the institutions. A participant stated:

Students come, share these experiences and realize that there is another kind of reality; I mean, they could have everything and when it happens, they can't acknowledge what other people do not have, it refers also to the physical, intellectual, economic, social and cultural skills (translated by author).

In relation to the proactivity, an interviewee also told:

We love that students come, they are part of this institution, and sometimes they ask or say if they can help to do something because they are good at fixing computers, and once our computer was damaged. They get involved in the activities that we perform (translated by author).

In order to answer RQ1 about the impact of service-learning, the participants mentioned extra elements or activities that students were able to perform in their organizations. They highlighted these elements such as proactivity because students contributed a lot by performing these extra activities.

### **Research question 2**

This research question investigated the benefits that the community partners receive through service-learning applications. The question was “do you think that the institution receive any benefit? If the answer is affirmative, explain the benefit”. The participants' answers highlighted several aspects that are related to four of the thematic categories which are the permanent requirement of assistance, service-learning program outcomes in the community, students' engagement and work in the community and students and community partners' bonds.

Thematic category 1: The permanent requirement of assistance. In this category, the participants mentioned: the children's socio-economic background, the reason why they often

require help, how their organization is and the responsibilities they have, and how the community managers get involved in the work directly with the children. In relation to the children's background, a community manager declared that:

When students arrive, they realize how the children's conditions are; that is to say, they acknowledge how complex the children's lives and the relationships that they keep with others are, a child who has any kind of special need, requires a lot of money because they need it for their therapies, for their health (translated by author).

In addition, another interviewee stated: "these children are like have a hunger for hugs when they do not have the parents, or just one. They are very warm, sadly, many of them lack affectivity, hugs, embraces even kisses".

In his Biopsychosocial model, Kiesler (2000) mentioned that some elements must be analyzed because they could affect the individuals' health. These participants' responses highlighted two factors: vulnerability that is considered an internal factor that refers to a problem that an individual predisposes, and in this particular situation the fact that children suffer Down syndrome. Meanwhile the second participant's answer focused on one factor that is an external risk called such as poverty.

In relation to the assistance requirement, three participants emphasized their need of permanent help. A participant stated: "we are a non-profit organization, foundation, we do not have enough funds and that is why any kind of help from organizations is welcome because it is useful for us and for the children, of course" (translated by author). Another one declared that they need help, but this help focused on people instead of economic resources:

What I have appreciated is that there is one person who is responsible for the library from Mondays to Saturdays, and she has to be in charge of all the children who sometimes attend in groups of 25 or 30 kids, and it is a lot of work only for one person (translated by author).



Finally, a community manager emphasized: “the number of needed or vulnerable people is too big, and our resources are not enough” (translated by author). As the managers get directly involved with children’s activities and welfare, there was one participant who shared the experience. As the participant put it:

We can do here what is allowed, we try to keep track of children’s learning because there are families that do not get involved in the children’s activities or they do not even care about them. Therefore, we provide children that kind of support, we have registered some children at schools and we have also collected money to pay extra expenses (translated by author).

The risk in this case is poverty and it was mentioned most of the time and by most of the participants.

However, there is another factor to be taken into account, which is resilience, which is “an internal tendency to rebound or recoil, to spring back, or the power to recover” (Kielser, 2000, p. 148). Due to the fact that children are exposed to an environment which does not have enough resources, they face their problems at home or at school in a positive way. In addition, considering the last answer, the Ecological System Model can be used to analyze the children’s setting. According to Bronfenbrenner (1996) a mesosystem is a “system of microsystems” (p. 25) in which two or more settings are interrelated to make individuals participate actively. These children’s system is altered negatively because two settings such as family and school do not have any kind of relation, the kids do things on their own.

Thematic category 2: Service-learning program outcomes in the community. In this category, three participants continued stating the positive effect that they found on the service-learning application. For example, an interviewee mentioned: “When a student comes, it is pretty valuable, because this person helps the teacher a lot. Then, the teacher does

not have a heavy workload, and children feel better because they always depend on someone” (translated by author).

In addition, two of the participants mentioned that service-learning application is of mutual benefit; in other words, this methodology provides benefits and advantages for the students as well as for the community partners. A participant mentioned:

I think that there is a mutual benefit, and that is why it is important to have volunteers.

There is mutual benefit because students get the benefit of being able to work with handicapped children who need patience in their learning process. Also, I think that they become sensitive towards special needs (translated by author).

Due to the fact that service-learning is considered a mutual benefit, it could be stated that the experiential learning theory could be detected because students are able to create knowledge through experience and a reflection process (Kolb, 1984). In other words, faculty evaluators of these programs should try to not only evaluate the outreach results but also get substantial feedback on the effects the participants feel their experiences have had on them.

Finally, four interviewees stated how they have appreciated the goals’ achievement and how children have received a great amount of assistance. An interviewee mentioned: “students help us a lot to manage the groups, to organize the activities; that is to say, they help children to be divided doing a variety of activities” (translated by author). Also, other community manager stated:

The teacher organizes all the activities, and when a boy has face-to-face interaction and assistance, it is better. The designated student is with a kid, he/she helps the kid to move, sit, stand up, move from one place to another, push the wheelchair, or to play.

So, these are the benefits. The child feels good, the teacher without too much workload and the student feels that he is doing something important and that he is helping a lot (translated by author).

These answers also contributed to the experiential learning theory analysis because students had to perform activities and practice what they had learned in the class.

Additionally, students made new connections between an active learning process, by collaborating and performing new activities, and becoming inquirers, by means of learning new things to help in a suitable way (Dewey, 1932).

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement and work in the community. In this category, some codes were identified first. These codes allowed the researcher to know some main features from students in the communities. Then, three participants identified that due to service-learning application, students were able to analyze and reflect upon real life situations that children, or benefactors, live or face every day. A community manager mentioned: "We appreciate that in such a way that students can acknowledge or face other reality or situations because children belong to families that do not have enough economic resources, other children need affection" (translated by author). In addition, another interviewee declared: "students know and learn about a different life style because the children live under vulnerable conditions" (translated by author). Students were able to reflect upon the experiences that they faced during their service period of time. Reflective inquiry is one of the most important areas and it is an essential element in the experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1908).

In relation to proactivity, a participant commented: "we incorporate art inside the activities that children perform, so students are creative, too. An example is a student who came by herself and she made children paint some paintings and we did a fair to sell all of them" (translated by author). Dewey (1932) stated that students should be inquirers in their active learning process. Therefore, proactivity demonstrated how students inquire and want to help in a deeper way the community partners.

Thematic category 5: Students and community partners' bonds. During the interviews, some key words appear when they answered RQ2. These words were students' engagement and responsibility in the community, collaboration after service-learning program and emotional affection.

Regarding the students' engagement and responsibility, two participants stated that these values were visible and positive on the students. A participant mentioned:

Students do get engaged with their work here and they are responsible, we also have their information and we ask them to let us know if they are not coming because their assistance is really important here. Also, students feel motivated and they become responsible for coming and collaborating (translated by author).

Similarly, four participants stated that students collaborated after their service hours, by visits or performing specific activities. An interviewee mentioned:

We have had some students who had finished working here, later they came back to visit us, so a couple of times the students came and they brought a cake for Christmas, they remember the children and they organized a little program, it was unusual for us (translated by author).

These participants' answers showed how students became more aware of what children face in their daily lives. In addition, students eliminated any kind of barrier with the community (Dewey, 1908).

Moreover, the participants stated that they could evidence a key element that is emotional affection. Four participants indicated the presence of this element between students and children. A participant mentioned:

There are some kids who create or generate empathy with one of the students. For example, here we have a girl who is pretty restless and she hardly ever obeys, so we have to talk to her steadily, and most of the men talked to her in that way and she

listens to, looks at them, gives her hand an obeys. We have had some volunteers who come and create a good relationship, so the girl listens and obeys and the learning process is good for her. Additionally, the volunteers are also sensitive and affectionate (translated by author).

Another interviewee stated that: “students come to meet their hours and activities; however, they get involved at work with children, and the emotional element appears”. A participant also declared:

It’s beautiful to see how children open their arms, so they see you come, they come for you and they just open their arms to get a hug and that is the best gift to me, to my heart, to see that, and it happens with students of San Francisco and other students or volunteers.

Finally, a community manager mentioned:

Students help a lot to the kids in some aspects such as acquiring some skills to socialize. Regarding that these children have suffered maltreatment, they can’t be in contact with others easily. So these kids create a bond or connection, their level of aggressiveness reduce because students are helping them. Also children improve their academic performance and behavior at schools (translated by author).

According to Seligman (2002), who focused on neuroscience, when human beings experience positive emotions, they are engaged in activities and they are able to find a meaning in life. In addition, they are able to discover new strengths and skills through the opportunities that they face.

### **Research question 3**

This research question focused on the possible challenges or inconveniences with the program. The question was “do you find any challenge or inconvenient with service-learning implementation in the institution? If the answer is yes, please explain it”. This question

includes the three thematic categories that are: service-learning program outcomes in the communities, in which the participants emphasized the reason why they haven't found any challenge or inconvenient; possible service-learning challenges and recommendation, which is related to the RQ3; and students and community partners' bonds, which stated some bonds that could have a negative effect on the community members especially on the children.

Thematic category 2: Service-learning program outcomes in the community. Four interviewees continued sharing the positive impact of service-learning on their communities. Moreover, five participants stated that they have not found any kind of challenge or inconvenient with service-learning application. Actually, they emphasized positive aspects about its application. An interviewee answered:

No, we have not had any kind of inconvenient so that we have kept the agreement for five years. Students come during the first period of the scholar year, and the other group comes in the second period, so we do not have any complaint. Students have good attitude (translated by author).

Thematic category 3: Possible service-learning challenges and recommendations. In order to have a better idea of what should be solved or taken into account, five participants highlighted the evidence of challenges and inconvenient. A community manager mentioned:

I have one challenge and it is that before sending students, teachers should talk to them or they should have a short training, so that students know the real situation and the place where they come to, what they come for, and what kind of children attend at this place. During the first days, it is pretty hard because children do not pay attention to the students or they don't obey because students are strangers for them (translated by author).

Another inconvenient was related to time, three participants discussed about the same challenge. For example, one participant stated:

Most of the time I tell volunteers that if they are going to spend more time here, they are welcome because when they come only one month or one hour, it's complicated. Instead of helping, they distract children, so kids do not learn appropriately. It is positive when students come for a long [length not stated] period of time (translated by author).

The matter of length of time was not pursued further because it was felt it was not highly relevant to the overall information gathered. Also, an interviewee mentioned the challenge that focused on students' careers or skills. An interviewee illustrated:

Yes, I have found a challenge. When students come from different careers and they do not have enough resources, skills or knowledge. Especially when children need academic support, here most of the children are pretty young and their learning process is slower. So, some students come and tell me that they can't do something and they ask for help because they cannot manage discipline in groups, especially with children who have mental disorders (translated by author).

Even though there is a lack of research about service-learning outcomes using any kind of framework such as PESM. Reeb and Folger (2013) also mentioned that the most common challenges that have been identified in other investigations are related to students' schedules and training needs. In this research, another difficulty was the lack of knowledge that students have in order to guide or help in the children's academic work: the interviewees are saying that the university project does not quite fulfill the requirements for a service-learning application (apparently some students are mere volunteers).

Thematic category 5: Students and community partners' bonds. Four participants declared that students' engagement and responsibility are evident elements in most of them. A community manager mentioned: "Ninety nine percent of the students have good attitude, their predisposition has also been suitable, most of them have demonstrated to be good

human beings in spite of their young age, we are grateful with that” (translated by author).

Two participants mentioned the emotional element between students and children. Although, these participants declared that the impact is positive, they also mentioned some inconvenient related to the emotional element, especially when students leave the communities. For example, a participant stated: “there are some students who cry a lot when they have to leave; for that reason, we have a meeting with students and children, and of course, children miss them a lot” (translated by author).

These participants’ answers are related to emotions, but they appreciated these emotions as negative ones. Positive emotions have been perceived by the community managers; however, once students leave quite often the bonds are dissolved. There have been emotions such as sadness. According to the neuroscience the ruptures or these events could have a positive effect on children. Schore (2005) stated that in early development:

(...) an adult provides much of the modulation of infant states, especially after a state disruption or a transition between states, and this intervention allows for the development of self-regulation. The key to this beneficial interaction is the caregiver’s capacity to monitor and regulate her own (especially negative) affect.

Furthermore, he maintained that self-regulation allows children to face situations or challenges controlling and tolerating their negative attitudes; as a consequence, resilience emerges. “The adaptive regulatory capacity of resilience in the face of stress is an ultimate indicator of secure attachment and optimal mental health” (Schore, 2005, p. 207).

#### **Research question 4**

This question has to do with community managers and their interpersonal and academic experiences in the implementation of service-learning applications, in their communities. This research question was “what kind of experiences have you had with service-learning and students in the institution?” This question was answered only using two



thematic categories which are: students' engagement and work in the community because it focused on the activities that students performed in the organization and the other category was students and community partners' bonds because participants mentioned several experiences related to students and children's emotions.

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement and work in the community. Interviewees emphasized that students were able to reflect upon a different reality than theirs and they can acquire new skills during service-learning application. A participant said:

The experience is for the students because they belong to a high social background, so here they can realize the need that children have, they also notice how children feel, how they should treat kids who do not have enough resources (translated by author).

Regarding students' skills and knowledge acquisition, an interviewee declared: "students, especially women, become children's teachers or therapists, they do it sometimes without having experience or any kind of information about it; however, they support children, which is really important" (translated by author). Similarly, another participant exemplified how proactivity was observed in the community:

There are some students who helped me in the creation of the webpage, this student had already graduated from the university and he told me that he was working for a web pages' company, so he has been working on this since then (translated by author). The experiences that students have had are related to the work that they had to perform in their organizations. In addition, these answers focused specifically on the students who served in their organizations.

Thematic category 5: Students and community partners' bonds. Five participants emphasized the students' engagement and the relationship that they have with children. All of their perspectives and experiences were positive. A participant mentioned: "students have a good relationship with the children. There are students from Education and there are also

students from Economy, Arts, Finance and other careers; however, the way students have good contact with kids is pretty good” (translated by author). Moreover, two participants mentioned that students collaborated once they have finished serving there, an interviewee stated: “the experience that we have had with the students is that they come back. After one or two weeks, they come to visit the children. A girl came on Christmas and she brought some presents for the kids” (translated by author).

These answers focused on the experiences between students and children and also relate to the bonds and connections that they had created. After analyzing these responses, it can be concluded that boundaries are eliminated between these two groups even though they come from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Dewey, 1908).

#### **Research question 5**

Regarding the agreements that the community managers have with the university. It was considered relevant to know how they work or apply the program. Then, the question was “how do you collaborate in the service-learning implementation?” This research question includes two thematic categories which are service-learning program outcomes in the community because it focuses on the agreement and how it has been applied. The other category is possible outcomes and students’ engagement and work in the community because the participants emphasized how students fulfilled their responsibilities according to program rules.

Thematic category 2: Service-learning program outcomes in the community. Two describing keywords addressed RQ5, these words were positive impact and the agreement that they have with the university’s service-learning program. Three participants emphasized the positive impact that service-learning has on the communities and all of the participants mentioned important facts or features about the agreement that they have with the service-

learning office. A participant mentioned merely important details such as general information or hours:

There is a document which has main information about the students, the hours they have to meet, the date, the number of days in a week and the activities that they have to do, and it also states that we do not have to pay any amount of money (translated by author).

Also, another participant stated:

We help by doing several activities, we have to do what the university wants, how the university wants us to monitor students' hours and we have to be aware that students have to be in contact with children. So, we have to follow the instructions to make students apply in the practice the theoretical part" (translated by author).

However, an interviewee mentioned that they haven't received any student:

This year we don't have yet any student, just a few weeks ago I was part of that event and some people signed up, but not yet anybody from the university. We hope that maybe next year from September on, but this year we don't have any student. We hope because we have only an amazing relationship and good feeling with the university and its students.

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement and work in the community. This category regards to how students get engaged with service-learning programs and mainly with children. It is considered important to state that organizations require students' collaboration. However, because of some elements, it's difficult for organization to have students there. For example, one participant stated that the students who want to help their organizations make the decision depending on some factors such as similarity or proximity. A participant mentioned:

Students can see the list of all the organizations that require help, so they see the name of this organization and they come. They say that they like children because they have relatives who are children and also because the place is close to their homes (translated by author).

### **Research question 6**

Some advantages, benefits and possible challenges have already been mentioned above, these elements have been identified by the interviewees; however, there were extra possible recommendations made by the participants about the service-learning program. The research question was “do you have any kind of recommendation or suggestion to improve this methodology?” In order to analyze the data, two thematic categories have been identified. The thematic category ‘service-learning program outcomes in the community’ was taken into account because three participants only stated the positive outcomes and there were not any kind of recommendations due to the program’s efficacy and efficiency. However, the category ‘possible service-learning challenges and recommendations’ was considered because seven interviewees stated the possible recommendations in order to improve the program.

Thematic category 2: Service-learning program outcomes in the community. Three participants did not mention any kind of recommendation as if they were satisfied with the status quo. A participant mentioned: “No, we do not have any recommendation. Actually, we try to organize things in a good way and receive several students; however, we cannot have a lot of students because the place is not too big” (translated by author).

Thematic category 3: Possible service-learning challenges and recommendations. Three participants mentioned restrictions and challenges, they focused on the lack of proactivity and commitment of a couple of students. An interviewee exemplified:

Once I asked a student to record a video about this in order to have evidence and present what you do, but the student did not do it. Also, sometimes there are not a lot of children and students stay quiet and do nothing, so students have to look for something to do, they should find some alternatives by themselves, they shouldn't wait for us to tell them what do to, they are already adults, so we should give them some responsibilities (translated by author).

In addition, seven interviewees provided some recommendations in order to improve the application of service-learning. A participant mentioned:

It would be nice to ask students to watch our webpage or videos before coming, so they would realize where they are going and who Salesians are. They should also have some training about how to deal with this situation, which is vulnerability (translated by author).

Two participants recommended to ask students to create a project while they are working on service-learning application. For example, a community manager recommended:

The service-learning office could ask students to create their own project, so students could avoid waiting for our instructions. They should create a personal project within the organization, so they could feel more motivated and responsible about what they are doing (translated by author).

Also, another community manager emphasized: “students can create a program or project, it would be good because they would have to make agreements, which is hard; work in team, which is important; look for leadership and some resources like economical ones and ideas” (translated by author). A participant recommended that the university keep inviting the community leaders to present the different projects that have been developed in the past and to attract more student participants for the future:

I liked that at the beginning, the service-learning office invited all of us, the community managers, to present our offer; that is to say, we presented everything, the students got more information about different places and later the students made the decisions. I used to have a lot of students interested in this organization. On the contrary, nowadays in the fairs students attend, but there are not a lot of students. A couple of them asked for information, but they already know which place to choose because of proximity (translated by author).

Moreover, another interviewee required for special help:

We could like to have an intern, who studies Psychology, for six months, I think this work is also going to be important for him or her. It would be a mutual benefit, they help us and I think that we also help people who come (translated by author).

Finally, a participant asked for human resources: “students are from different careers. There are few students who are studying education or psychology. It would be good to have more of these students because they have more tools or resources to help children” (translated by author).

Regarding these recommendations and PESM, the exosystem could be analyzed. The exosystem refers to “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1996, p.25). According to the interviewees’ answers, the children are affected by the decisions or events that happened in their institutions. For example, if community managers cannot promote their programs, it is more difficult to get student participants to join up; if less students participate there is a definite lack of assistance for children.

### **Significance of the study**

This project could be the beginning of more investigations about service-learning and the outcomes that it has on the communities. As it has been stated, there has been a lack of research on this topic, but these interviewees stated several perspectives, opinions and feedback about the application of service-learning programs in their organizations. They viewed the performance of the student-teachers as part of their evaluation of the of the implementation of the Service Learning methodology.. These communities require a lot of help, resources and support, the research could target their needs and provide specific assistance. In addition, the recommendations that they provide are useful in order to improve the program or the application.

This research could help service-learning teachers as well as future beneficiaries who could be interested in this application. Likewise, there were some assumptions which focused on interviewees, who could have avoided mentioned some important information because the researcher belonged to the same university that they have the agreement with. However, clarifying the study, the purpose and the goals of it, the participants provided as much information as possible in order to thank for what students do and to apply this research in a better way.

### **Summary about author's bias**

Even though the researcher was also the interviewer and was in charge of analyzing all the data, the researcher was as impartial as possible in order to provide real and unbiased information.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### Discussion of Findings: Research Questions Answers

After analyzing the data under the six thematic categories, it is essential to highlight the main and general ideas that correspond to each research question:

RQ1: What is the impact of service-learning methodology in the institution?

The community managers who were involved in the service-learning intervention and research highlighted that regarding the need of assistance that they continuously require in the communities, the help or activities that students performed were suitable and appreciated. All of the participants emphasized that the impact of this methodology on their communities was positive, both from an academic perspective and the participation of student-teachers. They exemplified that their students' attitude, engagement and behavior were positive elements, which were considered important during their serving period. In addition, they showed gratitude because the aid they received was extremely useful for several stakeholders such as: children who receive help through different activities, personnel staff because keeping one person in the classroom helped to have less work, and community managers who have perceived that the activities that students performed were well done.

Extra key elements found on students that impacted the community were proactivity and reflection, some students felt motivated in order to achieve goals that community managers did not imagine, students collaborated in several ways in order to provide the best treatment to children and community partners benefited from providing a better service to their target population. Furthermore, community managers perceived that service-learning allowed students to reflect upon reality because they faced a different situation or setting, which involved vulnerability and poverty.



Even though all the participants agreed that the impact was positive, a restriction was found in relation to the boundaries that community managers have with students; that is to say, they cannot perform all the activities they want to because of the agreement with the higher education institution they partner with.

Service-learning allows students to appreciate community needs and are able to develop a better relationship with community partners (Lester, 2015). As the participants from this research study stated, students felt motivated and committed which contributed to accomplish the communities' goals. In addition, important factors such as poverty and mental health issues were identified by the participants and how these factors can affect community partners, especially children's physical or mental health (Kielser, 2000). These are important elements that could be analyzed in order to train students in a better way, so that they could acquire the necessary skills or knowledge and provide a suitable service when working with vulnerable populations.

RQ2: Do you think that the institution received any benefit? If the answer is affirmative, explain the benefit.

The findings from the study indicated that participants found benefits in the community and specifically with children. Moreover, they also stated that an important feature of service-learning application is a mutual benefit; that is to say, the community partners are helped and the students also get a benefit that is the acquisition of knowledge or skills, and reflection upon real situations of different backgrounds.

The direct beneficiaries are children who require constant help from students, who engage in a service-learning experience within their organizations, in some circumstances kids need to be carried from one place to another because they have physical limitations and they cannot do it by themselves, or in other cases children require help to do their homework. In relation to the permanent assistance, it refers to children who have special needs, they

require a lot of attention and help. Therefore, students can provide individual assistance, which also helps the teachers decrease their workload. Although communities do not receive any kind of material resource or monetary compensation from students, the time that they provided was very valuable.

Moreover, one of the most remarkable elements that was considered as a benefit was the emotional element. Most of the participants mentioned that students and children created emotional connections that are treasured by children who do not receive it at home. Due to these bonds that they had created with children, students visited them after meeting their service-learning hours in order to spend time together.

Participants from this study stated the mutual benefit in which children received a lot of help while students were able to reflect upon reality. Students were able to experience several situations, which increased their reflective inquiry that is an important element in their active learning process (Dewey, 1916). Students were able to perform several skills such as analyzing what was taught in class and later apply that on real life situations (Dewey, 1916). Regarding the emotional element, children and students created a positive affective bond. These emotions allow human beings to find new strengths or skills, they could get engaged with the activities that they had to perform and positive outcomes could be found in mental health, social skills and work performance (Abe, 2011; Seligman, 2002).

RQ3: Do you find any challenge or inconvenient with service-learning implementation in the institution? If the answer is affirmative, explain it.

The participants involved in this study did not share the same point of view when they talked about challenges. One group, which represented the fifty percent of the sample, supported the program and that they did not find any problem or at least they hadn't had any issue with the program or students. However, the other fifty percent stated that they had identified possible challenges in their communities. This group emphasized several

challenges related to the period of time, the training that students receive, and knowledge or skills that students had acquired before working in the community.

In relation to the time, interviewees emphasized that sometimes the number of hours or months that students stay in the communities are not enough. However, some participants presented two issues related to the time because some of them stated that students' attendance in different days and hours is not appropriate for the community because the period is too short, actually they agreed with the fact that students attended only on Fridays. On the other hand, other participants wanted students to attend in different days because working with all of the students at the same time could become an inconvenient.

Regarding the training, students should know about the setting that could be totally different from what they are used to. Students should be required to have a better understanding about children and their human development stage. Moreover, community managers found challenges that could affect specifically the children because some students do not own some skills or knowledge in order to teach, explain, or handle issues that could arise with this particular population. This last challenge was emphasized mainly by community managers who worked with children with disabilities.

This situation could be avoided by providing a suitable preparation to students, making use of reflection and analyzing the possible challenges that could appear during the service period (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). Although the emotional element was considered positive, it could also become an inconvenient when children lose emotional stability because of the permanent change of students doing service hours in their particular organization.

Denzin (2007) stated that emotions influence human beings' decisions and behavior. Although negative emotions could be perceived as something negative in life, experiencing negative emotions could allow children to develop self-regulation or resilience, which are

positive characteristics of human beings that will help them through adulthood (Schoe, 2005).

RQ4: What kind of experiences have you had with service-learning and students in the institution?

Participants involved in the research shared that most of the experiences they had had with students and service-learning were positive. Some interviewees focused on students, they mentioned that students could reflect upon reality and the community managers noticed this fact because they were able to talk or discuss about some topics with them. Therefore, sharing their ideas and opinions allowed community managers to notice the importance of service-learning application.

Additionally, they had appreciated the relation that students were able to develop and maintain with children. In spite of the social levels; respect, assistance and engagement were remarkable elements on students. As a result of the service-learning experience most of the goals were accomplished by students in the organizations and both parts benefited.

Additional experiences community managers had with students were the visits and organization of programs for children by students who had already met the required service-learning hours. Most of the participants showed their gratitude for these events because they require economical resources, and when people donate or help through these activities, they felt very glad.

Finally, some participants declared that it was rewarding when they realized how students did their best and how they acquired skills or knowledge in order to take care of the children within their organizations. Even though students belonged to different majors at the university, when they were engaged and motivated, they acquired what was required in order to help children in a positive manner. The main goal was to support children with a committed human capital that spent quality time with them.

Students were able to eliminate any kind of boundaries with the community partners, specifically children that is how they were able to create bonds and connections (Dewey, 1908). As participants from this study mentioned, students' attitudes were remarkable and they were able to collaborate in a productive manner.

RQ5: How do you collaborate in the service-learning implementation?

All the community managers mentioned the agreement they had with the service-learning office, regarding the time, policies and recommendations. Participants also emphasized the positive impact they perceived and that they would continue working with the service-learning office in order to accomplish some community goals with the students.

Community managers invited students to be part of their organizations; however, students chose the place depending on some elements such as proximity or similarity. This was the reason why some organizations received a high quantity of students while other did not receive anyone in a period of time.

Bronfenbrenner (1996) emphasized important elements in his Ecological Systems Model to assess the agreement and participants' answers, the exosystem is essential because children, who are the direct beneficiaries, get affected due to the decisions that people from different settings make (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). In other words, children cannot participate actively in the decisions or activities that university students or community managers make, but they are the ones who are directly affected. For example, if students choose a place because of some elements such as similarities or proximity, children from other organizations do not receive any kind of assistance due to this decision that is not made by children.

RQ6: Do you have any kind of recommendation or suggestion to improve this methodology?

Even though three participants did not mention any kind of recommendation or suggestion about the service-learning program, seven community managers declared some

recommendations which could be taken into account in order to improve the program and improve the outcomes from the service-learning application. One of the recommendations was that students could elaborate a personal project before starting their hours because sometimes students would wait for instructions instead of taking the initiative to work on different topics that could be related to their majors.

In order to get students to participate in the communities, a suggestion was to organize talks instead of a fair, so that students would be able to have information about all the community partners and later they could make the decision about where to do their service hours.

Finally, due to the lack of assistance and personnel staff, participants asked for students from specific careers such as psychology or education because they have acquired more knowledge and skills to help children in the most suitable way. Regarding participants' requests, students should be well prepared in order to face the communities' real context. The program, the project and the goals could be presented in a clear way. Expectations must be clarified so that students can be able to help in an organized manner (Carson & Domangue, 2013). Also, students must know the communities' background in order to avoid any kind of misunderstanding (Carson & Domangue, 2013).

### **Limitations**

This research was done with ten participants who were specifically the community managers. At first, the sample were twelve individuals; however, because of time and organization, it was not possible to set an appointment with other community managers. In relation to the age, the community managers' age was not an important element in this research because the participants were the main observers who provided the necessary feedback about service-learning application, but in relation to the organizations, it focused on places which worked only with children. This research was based on Blouin and Perry'

investigation (2009) whose topic was ‘Whom does service learning really serve?’ This study emphasized the lack of research on service-learning outcomes from the community partners’ perspective. This is the first research that focuses on the outcomes of service-learning in Ecuador because only one private university applies it.

### **Suggestions for further research**

The recommendations for future research about service-learning and its outcomes are specific for this university because it is the only higher education institution in Ecuador that applies this methodology. To begin with, authorities of other Schools that might have an outreach-community program, should be made aware of the immense advantages of the Service-Learning methodology. Research could then be carried out with more participants or with all the community managers that have agreements with the service-learning office from this institution. In addition, further research could focus on different stakeholders such as personnel staff, parents or the direct beneficiaries that are children, teenagers or adults. Due to the fact that this study required extensive information, focus groups could be prepared with several stakeholders in order to get more information. Focus groups could provide interesting data because they would discuss several topics about what they have noticed in their communities. Similarly, future research could be assessed with PESM, but it could take into consideration other theories instead of the ecological systems model, so it could apply the biopsychosocial model or contemporary conceptualizations of interaction, which have different targets of study. Comparative studies could be done with other higher institutions from Latin America that use service-learning in order to compare and contrast different outcomes from this methodology.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions, viewpoints, experiences and feedback from community managers whose institutions worked specifically with children.

These communities were located in the north of Quito and they had agreements with the service-learning office from a private university in Ecuador. A qualitative research was important because it allowed the researcher to find several experiences focused on the phenomenon, as described by the interviewees (Creswell, 2003).

Even though service-learning has been widely applied by universities from the United States, there is still a lack of research on service-learning outcomes in the communities (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Regarding Ecuadorian background, the Ecuadorian Council for Higher Education (CES, 2017) stated that all higher education institutions must have a community engagement program; however, most of the universities' programs are different and only one private institution applies the service-learning methodology in Quito. There is still a lack of evidence about the outcomes that this methodology has on the communities, but this research presented some important findings from community managers.

The findings of this qualitative research emphasized the positive impact that service-learning has on the community partners' role of providing specific services to vulnerable populations. In addition, the positive impact was also related to the emotional bonds that students and children create. Moreover, the findings stated that there are some possible challenges which may be solved and recommendations which should be taken into consideration in order to improve service-learning interventions.



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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interview questions

1. What is the impact of the service-learning methodology in the institution?
2. Do you think that the institution received any benefit?
  - a. If the answer is affirmative, explain the benefit.
3. Do you find any challenge or inconvenient with the service-learning implementation in the institution?
  - a. If the answer is affirmative, explain it.
4. What kind of experiences have you had with service-learning and students in the institution?
5. How do you collaborate in the service-learning implementation?
6. Do you have any kind of recommendation or suggestion to improve this methodology?



## **APPENDIX 2: THEMATIC CATEGORIES AND CODES**

Thematic category 1: Permanent requirement of assistance

Codes:

- Help requirement
- Organizations' responsibilities
- Beneficiaries' background
- Managers involvement with community partners

Thematic category 2: Service learning outcomes

Codes:

- Positive impact
- Mutual benefit
- Beneficiaries' goals achievement
- No risks, challenges or recommendations
- PASEC agreement

Thematic category 3: Service-learning challenges and recommendations

Codes:

- Restrictions and challenges
- Recommendations

Thematic category 4: Students' engagement in the community

Codes:

- Reflection upon reality
- Proactivity
- New skills and knowledge acquisition
- Activities performed by students

Thematic category 5: Students and community partners' bonds

Codes:

- Engagement with children
- Collaboration after service-learning application
- Motional affections student-children
- Advertisement