

The Cultivation of College Students' Sense of Social Responsibility: An Analysis of Student's Involvement in Social Practice

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Abstract

College students' sense of social responsibility is college student's perception of the ethical care and obligations of others, communities, and countries. As an important way to cultivate college students' sense of social responsibility, social practice activities have received a lot of attention from higher education institutions, but the degree of participation of college students in practical activities and their impact on social responsibility have received little attention. This article reviews the literature related to social practice activities and the cultivation of college students' social responsibility, and discusses the theoretical basis, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework for studying the cultivation of social responsibility and college students' participation in social practice activities.

Keywords: College Students, Sense of Social Responsibility, Students' Involvement, Social Practice Activities

Introduction

The cultivation of social responsibility among college students is not a new topic, but rather a lasting and significant one. Higher education plays a pivotal role in enhancing knowledge development, citizenship, and innovation, and it constitutes the cornerstone of fostering responsible social citizens who contribute to the advancement of a sustainable world (Fonseca et al., 2019). The ongoing concern for higher education lies in the significance of social responsibility (Marián Queiruga Dios, 2020). UNESCO (1996) asserts that it is the responsibility of every member of society to fulfill their obligations towards others through their professional, cultural, association, and consumption activities daily. Therefore, colleges should be equipped to enable students not only to understand their rights and responsibilities but also to enhance their social skills and encourage participation in collective endeavors. Social responsibility is currently a prominent topic in the literature of American undergraduate education. It has become commonplace for universities to tout their ability to prepare students as responsible citizens who are concerned about global issues and

committed to serving others, whether on their campus websites or during presidential inaugural addresses (Jaschik, 2007; Fuller, 2008). In any case, cultivating citizens with social responsibility is an important goal pursued by every university, even if there are some differences, there is a consensus around the world.

Educational institutions must consciously provide students with experiential learning opportunities to develop critical skills and knowledge bases, which will effectively cultivate responsible citizens (Clark, 2016). In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the educational value of university students' social practices, which have continued to evolve in form and content. However, compared with certain countries such as the United States, Chinese college students exhibit relatively low levels of active participation in community service, voluntary service, and service for vulnerable groups. The challenges above are illustrated by the utilitarian inclinations of college students to prioritize social engagements over practical pursuits, limited participation in experiential learning opportunities, deficient affective and cognitive engagement, as well as a lack of foresight (Ge, 2020; Zhang, 2022; Wang, 2020; Chu, 2021).

Perhaps the most effective solution to enhancing college students' civic awareness and social responsibility lies not in organizing a variety of practical activities or providing external incentives such as policies and financial support, but rather in fostering their initiative and enthusiasm through participation, service, and reflection. If service-learning participation can evoke a sense of disquietude among students regarding the power and justice arrangements within any political institution or jurisdiction, then this experience can facilitate an awakening in students' comprehension of the significance of citizenship (Butin, 2005; Moss, 2009). The involvement of college students in social practice activities should not be perceived as an external constraint but rather transformed into an internal drive that inspires and sustains socially responsible behavior.

Problem Statement

The cultivation of a college student's sense of social responsibility is a multifaceted process, influenced by various factors such as familial, societal, and cultural circumstances, interpersonal relationships, teacher quality, institutional policies, peer associations, and individual characteristics. These elements collectively shape the development of college students' sense of social responsibility (Shen & Li, 2020; Luo, 2018; Shi, 2018; Wray-lake, 2010). Of course, numerous studies have explored the impact of college students' participation motivation, faith, and psychological factors on their sense of social responsibility. These studies provide valuable insights for our research. For instance, Jones and Hill (2003) discovered that high school community service participants who continued to engage in university community service shifted from external motivation to internal commitment toward serving others. Some scholars have researched the correlation between college students' belief in a just world and their sense of social responsibility (Cui et al., 2023), and the influence of positive psychology on college students' perception of social responsibility (Shen, 2023). Reeher and Cammarano examined the positive influence of active learning and concluded that education and citizenship reinforce each other. That is teachings at universities have a pronounced effect on students when the students are actively engaged in what they learn in comparison to more abstract theoretical teaching. Active engagement

is specific to items like judgment, regret, and deliberation; and each item relates to citizenship (Reeher & Cammarano 1997; Fuller, 2008).

Emphasizing students' social involvement, rather than mere service provision, has gradually become a focal point. In 1995, the American Association for the Study of Higher Education adopted "the Engaged Campus" as the theme of its symposium, prompting universities to place greater emphasis on connecting academics with social services. In 1999, the Kellogg Commission further explored the importance of public service and public participation in higher education in the report "Returning to Our Roots". Rimmerman identified three main barriers that faculty face as they try to inspire students to engage more in the public arena. The three main barriers identified were: first, the fact that people tend to engage more with their private interests rather than the public; second, the impact of the entertainment culture has resulted in students becoming more passive and less engaged in social activities; and third, students focus on preparing for a career, drive the type of classes the students take, rather than their community interests (Rimmerman & Cammarano, 1997; Fuller, 2008). Concerning the obstacles and problems that currently exist, some universities have become aware of the measures that have been tried to address these obstacles.

Meanwhile, although many higher education institutions offer volunteer opportunities for students, few provide structured learning opportunities to foster students' civic knowledge, skills, and values. Social responsibility is only marginally associated with academic research as a byproduct of higher education programs (Colby & Sullivan, 2009; Wren, 2021). Zhong (2021) pointed out that some university students exhibit a lack of social responsibility, including deficiencies in their sense of social justice morality, patriotic enthusiasm, and spirit of altruism. According to Mu (2020), the issues with cultivation lie in unclear goals at some institutions, content, and methods that are disconnected from students' reality, insufficient collaboration among all aspects of education for nurturing work, and ineffective practical education that fails to make a profound impact on students.

It is urgent to reflect on the impact of organization, participation, and cultivation of social responsibility in current social practice activities. The following inquiries may arise: What is the significance of recognizing that the active involvement of college students has a crucial impact on socially responsible education? The apparent response can be that taking initiative can be logically and operationally perceived as an endeavor to solve problems or an individual effort to address the challenges encountered in the social realm (Krech, 1946). Thus, participation in the formation, growth, and change of initiative can be seen as special cases of problem-solving behavior. Participation initiative is not only influenced by the process of social practice but also constitutes the essence of social practice activities. The functional analysis of active participation shows that active participation is not only a means to solve problems but also a means to try to solve problems. Therefore, the study of students' activities in social participation in the enthusiasm and significance and its relationship between social responsibility is by understanding the participation in social responsibility training function, teachers can not only better understand the enthusiasm of students in the practice of formation and the results, but also help practice organizers adjust their pattern, promote the enthusiasm of students to participate in.

Literature Review

The literature review section mainly provides a comprehensive summary of the literature related to this study, including social responsibility, civic education, student participation, college students' social practice activities, factors affecting social responsibility and other related concepts and terms, theoretical research, and practical exploration. Concurrently, an analysis of existing literature is conducted to identify any limitations in current research. Literature retrieval and acquisition is a crucial component in completing this section. To acquire literature resources, it is imperative to fully utilize the digital resources available, such as the Scopus database, ProQuest Thesis Full-Text Database, World eBook Library e-book database, and other relevant digital resources. Additionally, consulting pertinent books, periodicals, and news reports is also recommended. This literature provides a comprehensive and robust theoretical foundation, as well as an array of research concepts and methodologies.

Some scholars have defined the relevant concepts of student involvement. Sun & Ding (2010) believe that students' involvement refers to the time and energy invested by students in different activities under certain institutional environments and conditions, and participation determines where they can achieve development and to what extent. Chapman (2003) argued that student involvement refers to students' willingness to participate in school routine activities, which can be divided into cognitive, behavioral, and emotional participation in specific learning tasks. Christenson & Anderson (2002) argued that student involvement includes psychological involvement (such as belonging), behavioral involvement (such as involvement in specific activities), cognitive involvement (such as self-regulated learning process), and learning involvement (such as the timeliness of tasks).

Some scholars classify students according to different levels of involvement. Carbonaro (2005) distinguishes three different types of student involvement: rule-oriented, procedural, and intellectual. He posits that rule-oriented students adhere to the fundamental rules and norms mandated by the school. Procedural effort necessitates students to exert themselves in meeting specific requirements stipulated by their teachers, and procedural effort demands more from students than regular effort. Lastly, intellectual effort is demonstrated when students apply their cognitive abilities to comprehend intellectual challenges presented before them. Based on Carbonaro's division model of student involvement, Bao & Zhang (2013) divided students' involvement into three modes: rules-based involvement, procedural involvement, and autonomous involvement from the two dimensions of external constraints and occurrence fields of students' involvement.

The social practice serves as a vital bridge between universities and society, playing an indispensable role in the comprehensive development of university students. Many countries, especially China, attach great importance to the cultivation of college student's sense of social responsibility, with moral education in schools centered on this fundamental objective, and many universities have integrated students' civic awareness, civic responsibility, social responsibility awareness, practical ability, and other diverse needs into their curriculum. They have also planned to incorporate volunteer service, production practice, and other forms of community engagement. As a result, various activities such as community service, labor education, and commemorative events are being carried out. In China, college students' social practice is an important part of higher education activities and an important link to cultivating

college students' sense of social responsibility. Based on the general requirements of social practice activities for college students, colleges and universities have also formulated specific systems for students to participate in social practice activities.

Kang'an (2017) divides social practice activities into the following four types: teaching practice activities (design practical activities around the curriculum major according to the relevant national education standards), public welfare practical activities (refer to the purpose of helping people with special needs), theme practice activities (mainly use the vacation period of the school to infiltrate the whole country to conduct social investigation visits, policy and regulation publicity, and legal popularization), scientific-practical activities (students use their knowledge and apply their expertise to scientific creation).

Taken together, these various strands of research offer a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which university students engage with their communities through social practice activities. By building upon this existing knowledge base, we can continue to develop policies and programs that support and encourage meaningful student involvement in these vital areas. While the literature on the social practice activities of university students is valuable, it is worth noting that there are some common limitations in the literature on this topic. From the perspective of the development of social practice activities and policy evolution of university students, whether it is the study of social practice activities themselves or the classification of social practice activities, most of them are summary and analysis of the social activities of existing university students, prospective studies are relatively inadequate. Under the guidance of national policies and higher education goals, many universities have implemented a variety of practical activities. However, current research on social practice activities among college students primarily focuses on showcasing activity results and introducing activity organizations, there are few studies on the influence of social practice activities and different types of practice activities on the improvement of college students' values, service consciousness, and service-ability.

Social practice activities encompass a range of practical endeavors undertaken by students to comprehend and serve society, thereby fostering greater awareness of social responsibility among university students. Social practice activities enable university students to gain a profound understanding of social reality, identify the prevailing issues and challenges that require resolution, and enhance their social consciousness. This heightened awareness fosters a sense of social responsibility among university students, inspiring them to embrace their civic duty and make meaningful contributions to society. Secondly, engaging in social practice activities can enhance the practical and organizational skills of university students while improving their overall quality. Such experiences enable them to better adapt to societal challenges and changes, thereby laying a solid foundation for future career development. Finally, social practice activities can foster the team spirit and collaborative skills of university students, enabling them to better assimilate into society. This sentiment empowers them to actively engage in community initiatives and become exemplary citizens. Therefore, social practice activities have a significant correlation with the development of university students' sense of social responsibility. These activities not only enhance their overall quality but also foster their civic engagement.

Research has shown a positive correlation between volunteerism, social service, and university students' sense of social responsibility. Specifically, voluntary action is associated

with altruistic motivation, prosocial attitudes, and an increased sense of social responsibility among students. A study conducted by Rubin (2014) among dental university students has concluded that community service experiences can enhance their sense of social responsibility. Similarly, Jiang (2020) found that participating in volunteer services can contribute to the development of students' moral character, particularly about social responsibility.

Based on research into the impact of service-learning courses on university students' social responsibility, Wang (2022) discovered that such courses, particularly those addressing issues of social equity, exert a positive influence on students' sense of social responsibility and cognitive complexity. Compared to their peers who do not regularly engage in volunteer service activities or take mandatory courses within their majors, students with prior volunteer experience and those who voluntarily enroll in service-learning courses exhibit a heightened sense of social responsibility both before and during class. Additionally, these students demonstrate greater improvement in social responsibility throughout the course. Marichal agrees that in service-learning programs, students' morality continues to mature as their attention, empathy, and empathy for social issues grow (Marichal, 2010). Students gain deeper exposure to community work through service-learning, which not only meets community needs but also offers great potential for civic responsibility (Gottlieb, 2006).

This study aims to comprehend the impact of college students' involvement in social practice activities on their sense of social responsibility. To achieve this objective, we have integrated three theoretical perspectives, including service-learning theory, student involvement theory, and social cognitive theory. The theoretical framework is illustrated by the following Figure 3.1.

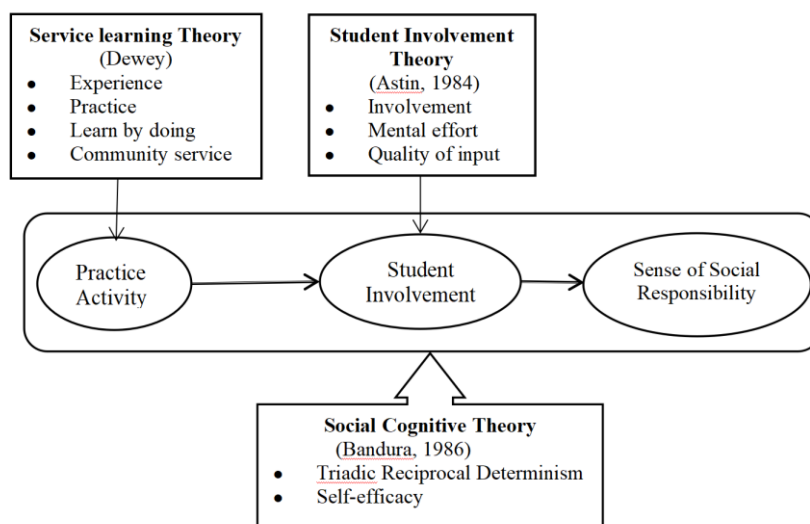


Figure 3.1 Theoretical Framework

Service-learning theory specifically emphasizes experiential learning through active engagement, emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge and skills through practical activities, which lays a foundation for this study to explore the role of social practice activities on college students' sense of social responsibility. Student involvement theory illustrates how the effect of the quantity and quality of student input on outcomes. From student involvement theory, when students participate in extracurricular practical activities, they can be encouraged to

actively interact with others and build their world, which helps them achieve the effect of activities, on the contrary, rules-based engagement will hinder the formation of students' learning motivation and skills. This means a high-quality social practice activity project should reflect the following characteristics: actively encourage participants to engage in inquiry, carry out various forms of reflective activities, and maintain an in-depth dialogue between participants and community partners. Based on these theoretical analyses, a correlation can be observed between social practice activities, a sense of social responsibility, and their involvement in practical activities. The theoretical framework utilized in this study is an indispensable component of the research, providing direction and coherence to the entire process.

This study does not aim to address all the influencing factors comprehensively, but rather focuses solely on examining the impact of social practice activities as a specific organizational activity on students' sense of social responsibility, and aims to investigate the influence of students' involvement in practical activities as a mediating variable on the sense of social responsibility. The conceptual framework illustrated in

Figure 3.2 facilitates comprehension of understanding the role and influence of university-led social practice activities and student involvement on college students' sense of social responsibility.

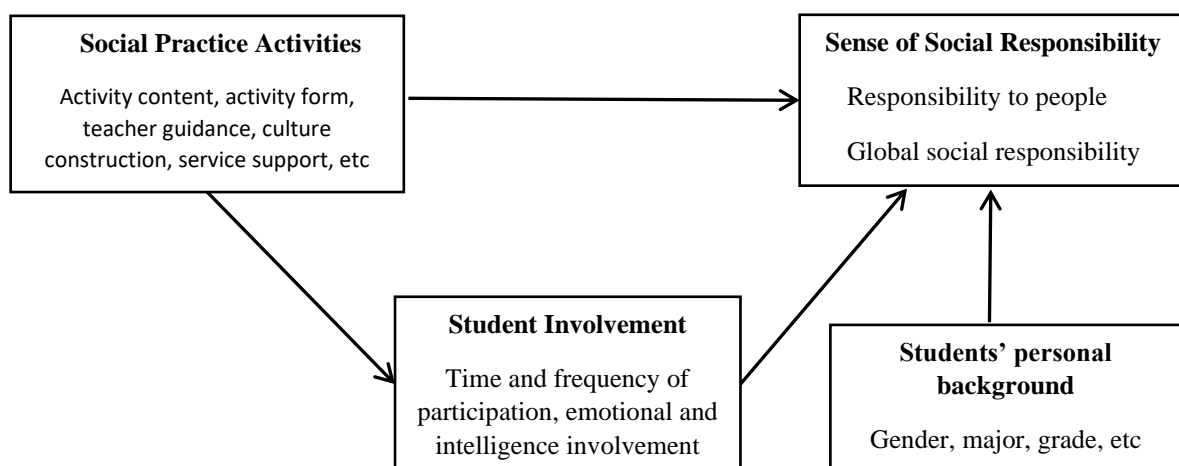


Figure 3.2 Conceptual Framework of this Study

This study is driven by a deep-seated desire to explore the ways in which university students can be empowered to become more socially responsible citizens. By examining the impact of social practice activities on their development, hope to uncover new strategies for fostering greater levels of civic engagement among students. This study will benefit the instructors and supervisors of student social practice activities. Many studies have demonstrated the significant role of social practice activities in facilitating university students' engagement with the community, comprehension of society, service to others, cultivation of a sense of citizenship, and enhancement of their social responsibility. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the interplay between university students' participation in social practice activities and practical engagements as well as their development of responsibility awareness.

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