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In the Pursuit of Justice: A Case Study on the Role of Service-Learning in Developing Civic Engagement among College Students in Egypt

À la poursuite de la justice : une étude de cas sur le rôle de l'apprentissage par le service dans le développement de l'engagement civique chez les étudiants postsecondaires en Égypte.

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Abstract

Service-learning is a form of experiential education that connects classroom instruction with community service for the benefits of the partners involved. While the effects of service-learning on college students are well documented in Western settings, considerably less is known about these effects in Eastern contexts. Given the current profound political changes in Egypt and the greater Arab world, this research utilized a case study design to explore the potential of service-learning for developing civic awareness among college students at a university in Northern Egypt. Findings revealed that participation in service-learning allowed students valuable opportunities to connect with others from backgrounds different from their own. Through their work in the community, students gained important civic skills, including thinking critically and addressing public problems, developing perspective-taking positions, and enhancing coping capabilities. The study outcomes suggest a cultural shift in Egypt that validates young adults as a productive segment of population thus affording them structured opportunities for civic engagement through which they could exercise their leadership skills and effect positive change in their communities. The ongoing critical engagement of students in their communities where they grapple with questions about the structural causes of inequalities in society is pivotal for service-learning to be a truly empowering learning experience.

Résumé

L'apprentissage par le service est une forme d'apprentissage expérientiel qui connecte l'instruction en salle de classe avec le service communautaire pour fournir des avantages aux partenaires impliqués. Alors que les résultats sur les étudiants postsecondaires de l'apprentissage par le service sont bien documentés dans les contextes occidentaux, on en sait beaucoup moins sur ces résultats dans les contextes orientaux. Étant donné les profonds changements politiques actuels en Égypte ainsi que dans le monde arabe en général, cette recherche a utilisé un format d'étude de cas pour explorer le potentiel de l'apprentissage par le service afin d'accroître la sensibilité civique chez des étudiants postsecondaires dans une université du nord de l'Égypte. Les résultats ont révélé que la participation à l'apprentissage par le service offrait aux étudiants des occasions précieuses d'établir des relations avec d'autres venant de milieux différents du leur. Par leur travail dans la communauté, les étudiants ont acquis des savoir-faire civiques importants, dont la pensée critique et la réponse à des problèmes publics, l'acquisition d'une perspective en prenant position et le renforcement des capacités d'adaptation. Les résultats de l'étude suggèrent un changement culturel en Égypte qui confirme que les jeunes adultes représentent un segment productif de la population, ce qui leur permet d'avoir accès à des opportunités structurées pour l'engagement civique à travers lesquelles ils peuvent exercer leurs habiletés en leadership et effectuer des changements positifs dans leur communauté. L'engagement critique actuel des étudiants dans leurs communautés où ils sont confrontés à des questions portant sur les causes structurelles des inégalités dans la société est fondamental pour que l'apprentissage par le service devienne une expérience d'apprentissage vraiment valorisante.

Keywords: service-learning; higher education; civic learning; college students; critical pedagogy; Egypt

Mots clés : apprentissage par le service; enseignement supérieur; apprentissage civique; étudiants postsecondaires; pédagogie critique; Égypte

Service-learning gained momentum on many university campuses as an engaging pedagogy to promote student learning and persistence (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Song, Furco, Lopez, & Maruyama, 2017). The increasing popularity of this pedagogy in postsecondary education is supported by accumulating evidence showing the positive effects of service-learning on college students' civic, social, personal, academic, professional development, and persistence (Celio et al., 2011; Shalabi, 2017; Song et al. 2017; Warren, 2012; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Beyond college students' gains from this pedagogy, service-learning is promoted for broader aims including reviving the civic mission of higher education (Scheibel, Bowley, & Jones, 2005) and as a gateway into public service for students (Ehrlich & Fu, 2013).

Service-learning is a pedagogy that answers Boyer's (1990) call to reconsider the priorities of higher education such that it includes a consideration for the community in addition to the traditional forms of scholarships: discovery and teaching. Boyer (1996) introduced the scholarship of engagement noting that it means linking the rich resources of the university with the most pressing civic, social, and ethical issues in the community. He explained that the scholarship of engagement aims to establish a climate in which the academy and the community collaborate more frequently and in more creative ways to enrich the quality of life for all. Boyer posited that this type of scholarship would lead students and faculty to perceive campuses "not only as isolated islands, but as staging ground for action" (p. 21). Service-learning is a form of the scholarship of engagement that deliberately connects course content with community service so that each strengthens the other (Scheibel, Bowley, & Jones, 2005; Shalabi, 2017). Significantly, the principles of the scholarship of engagement are consistent with the core theme of critical pedagogy that emphasizes education as an agent of change. An overview of critical pedagogy is presented in the section that follows.

Critical pedagogy appeared in the 1980s as a new area within critical education, suggesting "a language of possibility" (Giroux, 1997 as cited in Cho, 2013). Critical pedagogy scholars emphasized "hope" and "emancipation" as core goals in the curriculum to enable students to critique the power structures within the educational system, which represents the larger social system, and envision ways to democratize these structures (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). Constructing education as a change agent is the core concept of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000; Giroux & McLaren, 1989). Giroux and McLaren emphasized that education should be repositioned such that it becomes a main stakeholder in social life that aims to develop a critical citizenry who participates in reforming economic, political, and cultural life. Similar to Freire's notion on education as the pursuit of freedom, Giroux (1983) posited:

If a citizenship education is to be emancipatory, it must begin with the assumption that its major claim is not 'to fit' students into the existing society; instead, its primary purpose must be to stimulate their passions, imaginations and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social, political, economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives. In other words, students should be educated to display civic courage, i.e., the willingness to act as if they were living in a democratic society. (emphasis in original, p. 201)

Another key premise of critical pedagogy is that curriculum should be based on the experiences and voices of students (hooks, 1994; Shor, 1992). In this regard, hooks noted that choosing course content is a political decision. She lamented that politics of domination and superiority are often reproduced in educational settings. In contrast, she proposed the idea of education as the practice of freedom that simultaneously encourages interrogating biases in the curricula that perpetuate systems of domination. This form of education also provides new ways to teach diverse groups of students.

Emphasis on dialogue and pedagogy as praxis are core themes in critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007). Unlike banking structure of education where students are passive listeners, critical pedagogy cultivates an environment for students to become investigators who engage with their teachers in dialogue. hooks (1994) noted that dialogues in the classroom ensure that “no student remains invisible in the classroom” (p. 41), and posited that professors should pay attention to “Who speaks? Who listens? And why?” (p. 40). hooks stressed the issue of voice and argued that listening to one another helps recognize the value of individual voices which in turn leads to building a sense of community and environment that encourages openness and intellectual rigour.

Freire (2000) noted that critical pedagogy entails authentic thinking which does not materialize in isolated ivory towers. Rather, it is about the real world. He argued that liberation is praxis which is people’s reflection on the world and actions to transform it; he emphasized that authentic reflection considers people in their relationship with the world rather than abstract people or the material world in isolation of people. Service-learning holds real possibility for critical engagement with the community and praxis for effecting positive change. The efficacy of service-learning as critical pedagogy is discussed in the section that follows.

Service-learning pedagogy is grounded in Dewey’s notion in which active learning requires the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience (Ehrlich, 2000). Critical reflection is an essential component of service-learning which enables students to link theory to practice, puts their experiences in context, and engages them more fully with what they learn in the classroom and experience in their community service (Kaye, 2004; McCarthy, 2003). Critical reflection in service-learning enables students to broaden initial, simplistic notions of the world into more complex and true representations of the problems in real life outside of the classroom, and “leads to a deeper sense of civic self-efficacy and a greater commitment to act on behalf of oneself and others within the community” (Mitchell, Richard, Battistoni, Rost-Banik, Netz, & Zakoske, 2015, p. 51). Ideal service-learning courses should be conducted within a framework of respect, democracy, and reciprocity between university and community partners (Butin, 2010; Shalabi, 2012).

Consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy on the importance of engraving spaces for students’ experiences and voices, service-learning courses establish the conditions for students to participate actively in the course decisions and class activities, including choosing service sites and projects. Service-learning projects allow students opportunities to work in the community on issues that relate to their social, political, and cultural identities. Similar to Freire’s (2000) recommendation on using problem-posed pedagogy as a means for liberating and emancipating education, service-learning presents students with real-life problems where they collaborate with their peers, instructor, and community members on addressing these issues while deepening their learning. Additionally, the nature and structure of service-learning intersect with critical pedagogy goals of encouraging dialogue and redefining student-teacher relationship. Stenhouse and Jarrett (2012) suggested that collaboration on service-learning projects encourages students to “look toward each other rather than just to authority figures in initiation change” (p. 72). As students’ sense of self-efficacy is enhanced through service-learning, they become better able to develop “habits of resistance,” which Shor (1992) regarded as fundamental goals of critical pedagogy. Likewise, as praxis is emphasized in critical pedagogy as a liberating mechanism, reflection is thus considered as an integral component of service-learning. Everhart (2015) explained that reflection in service-learning leads students to pause and assess their attitudes, preconceived notions, and the needs of their community. Everhart

elaborated that reflection urges students to think about what they are studying and how it is different from what they have thought; he noted that “cognitive dissonance can lead to change, personal growth, and moral reasoning” (p. 5). Reflection is the vehicle through which students think critically about the reading materials and what they encounter in their service sites. It serves as a platform for students to envision change for the issues they are working on and to make plans to realize this change, thus making a positive difference in their communities. As such, service-learning and critical pedagogy intersect in themes and aims. They both emphasize contextualized learning and communication, redefine student-teacher relationship, and aim for positive change. The promise of service-learning as a high-impact teaching method can be attributed, in part, to its efficacy to put the ideals of critical pedagogy in practice. Informed by scholarship theorizing the intersection between service-learning and critical pedagogy (King, 2004; Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012), this study aimed to explore the potential of service-learning as a form of critical pedagogy for instilling college students’ civic skills in Egypt thus empowering them to engage and effect reform in their communities.

Overview Egyptian Context

It is important to situate the research in its context for better understanding and appreciation. The Arab Republic of Egypt is well known for its venerable history as the cradle of ancient civilizations. The country enjoys a strategic geographic location with access to Africa, Asia, and Europe in addition to the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and the River Nile. Egypt’s history and location, among other factors, has made it an influential country in the world. Egypt is a populous country with more than 81 million inhabitants, among which young adults (cohorts under the age of 24) constitute over 54% of its total population (LaGraffe, 2012). Arabic is the native language of the country, but English is taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 to 12 in public secondary education. In addition to English, other Latin languages including French and German are introduced as second foreign languages and taught as compulsory subjects in public high schools. Students may continue to study foreign languages in postsecondary education depending on their field of study and the institution they attend. Given its integration in early stages in the public educational system, English is commonly used among Egyptians in formal and informal communications (Shalabi, 2017).

Higher Education and Community Engagement

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) which oversees postsecondary education in Egypt highlights community engagement in its mission: “Endeavors to achieve the Egyptian universities’ autonomy and to have a skilled graduate competitive with the international labor market to achieve linkage between higher education and the community needs” (MHESR, 2018). Implied in this mission is an awareness of the value of connecting postsecondary education with the needs of the community. Community engagement gained momentum in Egyptian higher education after the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) in 2007, a government body charged with the task of overseeing quality assurance and accreditation at all levels of Egyptian education (McIlwraith & Fortune, 2016). NAQAAE specifies community engagement and environment development as core criteria for assessing the institutions that opt for accreditation. NAQAAE pinpoints several indicators for assessing these criteria, including the institution’s articulated goals for community service, the mechanism it employs to assess community needs, the number of community service units within the institution, the range of activities that the

institution does in collaboration with its community and how these activities are informed by the institution's mission and plan, and the evaluation mechanisms the institution uses to assess its impact on the community (MHESR, 2018). Fulfilling this requirement to gain accreditation underlies Egyptian universities' engagement with their communities. This engagement takes several forms, such as providing professional development courses, technical advice, and launching awareness campaigns in the surrounding communities. Student engagement is typically encouraged through extracurricular activities in the form of conducting volunteer works. However, the concept of integrating community service in the curriculum is still new and atypical in Egyptian higher education (Shalabi, 2017). Besides higher education, community engagement in Egypt is empowered by broader factors, including culture, religion, and the growing number of not-for-profit organizations. While an extensive discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper, the sections that follow briefly illuminate each of these factors.

Culture

Egypt is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Eastern culture with its collectivist nature. Social connectedness is a key aspect of collectivism defined as a trait of the self that exhibits the subjective recognition of being in close relationships with the social world. This enduring sense of connectedness then guides people's feelings, beliefs, and behaviour in social situations (Lee & Robbins, 1998). As such, it is critical for members of collectivist cultures to feel socially connected and satisfied with existing social support networks. Egyptian values are also heavily grounded in the Arab culture. The internal dynamic within the Arab culture mirrors one's relation to the community at large. Barakat (1993) explains that the root of the word family, "aila عيله" or "usra اسره" in Arabic means "to support" and the concept signifies relationships of reciprocity and interdependence as well as mutual commitment and substantial self-denial. The deep attachment and sentiment within the family in the Arab culture extend to the greater community such that others' welfare is considered integral to one's own well-being. The ethics of care is especially demonstrated in times of difficulty and sorrow as individuals come close to support one another and work collaboratively on alleviating the hardships.

Religion

Besides culture, religion has a major influence on how people think and behave in Egypt. Despite the religious diversity in Egypt, Islam is the dominant religion in the country. Significantly, Islam provides stimulus for community engagement. The Holy Quran, and Prophet Muhammad's sayings—known as Hadith Sharif—are the sources of the Islamic creed. Both sources motivate people for caring for one another and participating actively in their communities. For example, in the Holy Quran, Muslims are called upon to "cooperate in righteousness and piety; but do not cooperate in sin and aggression" (Surat Al-Maidah, verse 2 as cited in the Electronic Moshaf, 2020). Virtue is described in the Holy Quran as the quality of the one who "gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer, and gives the Zakah¹; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship . . . those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who they are the righteous" (Surat Al-Baqara, verse 177 as cited in the Electronic Moshaf, 2020).

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged people to look after their broader community, explaining that one who is concerned with others is better than one who is

¹ Obligatory charity on an annual basis.

devoted to meditation: “A Muslim who meets with others and shares their burdens is better than one who lives a life of seclusion and contemplation” (narrated by Muslim as cited in the wisdom, 2016). In another Hadith Sharif, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explained that alleviating the sufferings of others are among the most virtuous deeds: “What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the sufferings of the injured” (narrated by Bukhari as cited in the wisdom, 2016).

Moreover, giving Zakat, obligatory charity, is among the five pillars of Islam. In addition to Zakat, Islam teachings strongly encourage Muslims to give Sadaqa², voluntary charity. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “charity does not diminish wealth” (Riyadh-us-Saleheen, Volume 1, Hadith 556). Significantly, Prophet Muhammad clarified that giving charity is not confined to monetary assistance. But rather, multiple actions of behaving well with others and supporting one another are also considered charity (sadaqa):

Sadaqa is owed by every limb people have. Every day on which the sun rises in which someone establishes justice between two people is sadaqa. To help a man with his animal and help him onto it is sadaqa. Or to lift his goods onto it is sadaqa. A good word is sadaqa. Every step you take to the prayer is sadaqa. Removing an obstacle from the road is sadaqa. [Agreed upon]³

The repeated emphasis in Islam, the dominant religion in Egypt, on the ethics of care and community engagement, shows the role of religion in encouraging community engagement in the country. In addition to religion and culture as general motivators for civic engagement, the growing number of not-for-profit organizations also has a significant impact on promoting civic awareness and engagement especially among Egyptian youths.

Growing Number of Not-for-Profit Organizations

In addition to these general motivators, the growing number of nongovernmental social service agencies and youth struggle for self-actualization are two additional factors that explicate commitment to civic engagement, especially among college students in the last two decades. In reaction to the deteriorating economic conditions in Egypt and the failure of government to address these challenges, an increasing number of not-for-profit organizations were founded since late 1990. Among these agencies, Resala English translation *Message* stands out as the most popular one that has achieved evident success in terms of assisting several disadvantaged groups in Egyptian society. Started by a group of engineering students in the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University in 1999, Resala aims at uplifting the society and spreading a spirit of positivity among Egyptians. The organization was announced as a charity-based organization in 2000. Since then, it has been growing rapidly in size and scope. Currently, it has more than 60 branches located in Cairo and other locations across Egypt. *Message* provides a wide variety of social services, such as providing monetary support for the needy, offering health services at a discounted rate to the poor, assisting groups with special needs, and distributing food packages on a monthly basis, in addition to organizing awareness-raising campaigns and providing shelter for the seniors and street children. Significantly, *Message* managed to attract a myriad number of volunteers, many of whom are college students. While the organization has its own staff, it depends heavily on volunteers in accomplishing its mission (Resala, 2020). *Message*

² Giving charity voluntarily on an ongoing basis.

³ “Agreed upon” is a term that describes Prophet Muhammad’s sayings when they are documented by both Scholars Bukhary and Muslim.

alongside other community-based organizations play a key role in raising awareness of the plight of the poor and disadvantaged, thus energizing Egyptians, particularly young adults, to take civic actions to address these issues.

Youth Struggle for Self-Actualization

Youth civic engagement is also motivated by their struggle for effecting change in their communities and for self-actualization. Although young adults were always at the forefront in major events that shaped Egypt, including the struggle for liberty from the French and British occupations, they have been suffering from marginalization for decades. This systemic marginalization can be attributed to cultural and political factors. The Egyptian culture that favours experience over talents has resulted in appointing seniors for leadership positions in the government while denying youth's access to key positions through which they can effect change. This underestimation of youth capabilities in Egyptian culture is further intensified by the autocratic governing regimes that discourage and sometimes even penalize youth attempts to express their views and engage in action to uplift their communities. These two factors resulted in disappointing young people and limiting their participation in civic life for decades. However, young people did not rest for such marginalization. Rather, they organized themselves and led the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011, raising the famous slogan: "Social justice, freedom, and dignity." Although none of these goals has come true yet, the revolution left young people with a sense of empowerment and an enduring feeling that they could effect change in their society.

As described above, the civic engagement movement in Egypt is motivated by several factors, including higher education, culture, religion, and youth marginalization. The civic momentum in Egypt among youth is mainly expressed on university campuses in volunteer activities through student unions. However, the notion of connecting academic coursework to community service is atypical in Egypt. By highlighting the potential of service-learning at a university in Egypt, the author hopes to urge Egyptian academia to consider promoting community engagement through the mainstream pedagogy and curricular offerings in addition to the prevailing model of extracurricular activities. The subsequent sections describe the theoretical framework guiding this research, present a review of pertinent bodies of literature, and introduce the method and findings of the study. A discussion of the implications of the findings for practice and research concludes the article.

Theoretical Framework

As a form of experiential learning, service-learning is grounded in the theories of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Ewell, 1997; Kolb, 1984). This study was guided by Dewey's theories on the relationship between democracy and experiential learning. Dewey (1916) highlighted the significance of experience in learning, arguing that all genuine learning comes out through experience. He further asserted that experiential learning is essential to civic education, noting that students develop the skills required for participating in a democracy through experiential learning. According to Dewey (1938), experience involves two principles, interaction and continuity. By interaction, he meant that students' experiences result from their interactions with their environment. By continuity, he noted, "Every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Dewey also explained that the habits people develop from past experiences influence their future experiences. Dewey posited that experiential learning is superior to conventional

teaching methods because of the role experience plays in students' development (the principle of continuity) in addition to its potential of engaging students in their environment (the principle of interaction).

Furthermore, Dewey (1916, 1938) argued that school learning should be connected to real life experiences, and that formal education should encourage continuity between internal development and exposure to external surroundings. He argued that students' involvement in community activities stimulates an interest in learning about school subjects, and that exposure to concrete problems generates more abstract learning. He contended that such an interaction develops the skills citizens need to act in a democracy. Dewey's synthesis of democratic and experiential education provides theoretical basis for this research that aims to examine how students' participation in service-learning affects their civic skills. Significantly, Dewey's conceptualization of experiential education is consistent with the critical pedagogy idea of constructing knowledge with students (Freire, 2000). The following section presents a brief discussion of pertinent bodies of literature.

Literature Review

The Connection between Service-Learning and Civic Engagement

Service-learning has become popular on many university campuses as a means to engage students and promote their learning (Song et al., 2017). One of the key arguments for institutionalizing service-learning on university campuses is its potential to promote college students' civic engagement. Specifically, it is recommended as a means for students to learn about and take part in their local communities and be concerned with questions about social justice and different cultural norms. In this paper, civic engagement is defined as "individual and collective action designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (APA, 2015). Several theoretical frameworks offered explanations of how service-learning works to promote students' civic learning and engagement. Battistoni (2013) summarized these explanations into three proposals. First, proponents of constitutional leadership (Rawls, 1971) believe that service-learning may help students learn the specific civic and political knowledge required for informed citizenship in a representative democracy (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli, 2006). The reflection component in this pedagogy may be instrumental in fostering connections between what students encounter at service sites and political and policy challenges (Brandenberger, 2013). Second, scholars holding a more communitarian conceptualization of citizenship (Etzioni, 1993) perceive service-learning as a means to connect students to their greater community and its concerns. This, in turn, helps students understand and appreciate community norms and civic responsibilities. Third, those holding a more participatory or public work conceptions of citizenship (Barber, 1992; Boyte, 2008) conceive service-learning as a trigger to civic identity which encourages individuals to interact and work collaboratively with others, as well as to become change agents who are concerned with addressing public issues and making a positive difference in the community.

The Influence of Service-Learning on Civic Outcomes for College Students

Mounting evidence using different study designs demonstrated the potential of service-learning to yield positive effects on college students' academic, social, personal, civic, and professional development (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Warren, 2012; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Concerning civic gains, Astin and Sax (1998) reported that participation in service-learning positively affects students' civic responsibility: increased commitment to serve the community, higher interest in

influencing the political structure, and more motivated in helping others in difficulty. Other research findings indicated that participation in service-learning increases students' sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Keen & Keen, 1998), and orientation towards future volunteerism (Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker, & Wells, 2008). After a review of research on how college affects students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that evidence is "conclusive" (p. 304) that service-learning affects sociopolitical attitudes and beliefs. In a longitudinal study, Astin et al. (2006) found that service-learning, as compared with volunteerism, during the undergraduate years predicted political engagement after college. Other research findings indicated that service-learning students demonstrated a boost in positive attitudes and behaviours related to community involvement. These students also showed higher interest in, commitment to, and sensitivity towards their communities and their needs, and firmer beliefs that one can make a difference in the world (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Celio et al., 2011).

Civic Education

Civic engagement language tends to be somewhat vague, indicating different meanings and interpretations to different people (Battistoni, 2013). The contested nature of the citizenship concept made it difficult to develop theories on education for civic engagement. Specifically, the controversies around what it means to be a good citizen in a democracy resulted in a dilemma of specifying what constitutes civic learning (Battistoni, 2002, 2006). In this regard, Saltmarsh (2005) explained that the definition of civic education would differ from one institution of higher education to another according to the disciplinary perspective, the identity and mission of the institution, the academic strength on campus, and the particular social environment of the local communities of the institution. In spite of the controversy surrounding definitions of citizenship, there is a general consensus that civic education has three essential components: knowledge, skills, and values (Clark, Croddy, Hayes, & Philips, 1997; Saltmarsh, 2005). These elements were emphasized in Howard's (2001) definition of civic learning: "a strict interpretation of civic learning—knowledge, skills and values that make an explicitly direct and purposeful contribution to the preparation of students for active civic participation" (p. 45). Given the study's focus on exploring how participation in service-learning affected college students' civic skills, the section that follows provides an overview of this component of civic education.

Civic Skills

The idea of civic skills development is related to preparing citizens for engaging in public life. Battistoni (2002) identified a set of civic skills, such as creativity, teamwork, coalition building, collective action, civic judgment, civic imagination, and community organizing. Based on a thorough review of theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, Kirlin (2003) organized civic skills in four main categories: critical thinking, communication, collective decision-making, and organization. The category of critical thinking skills includes identifying, analyzing, synthesizing, explaining, and evaluating information about political and civic life. Examples of the skills in the communication category include public speaking and letter writing. The collective decision-making category includes a set of interrelated skills of expressing one's opinion, listening to others' opinions, and working towards consensus building for the collective good. Examples of this skill include active compromises and identifying and solving public problems. Organization skills refer to the skills required for completing tasks. Strategic planning,

running meetings, and taking action to improve political and civic life are examples of organization skills. The next section details the method of the study.

Method

This inquiry is part of a larger mixed method study that investigated students' perspectives of service-learning partnerships as well as the effect of a host of contextual and demographic factors on students' experiences with service-learning (Shalabi, 2017). This inquiry employed the case-study design of qualitative research to explore students' civic gains from their participation in service-learning. A case study is an in-depth description and investigation of a bounded system (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that case study stands apart from other forms of qualitative research in that it delimits the object of the study—the case—noting that the unit of analysis not the topic of exploration is what characterizes a case study. The unit of analysis in this study is four undergraduate college students who participated in service-learning at a private university in Egypt. This case is bounded in that it investigates how participation in service-learning affected these students' civic skills. The case-study methodology is especially suitable for investigating phenomena that are influenced by their contexts. In this respect, Yin (2014) noted that a case study is used to explore “a contemporary phenomenon the ‘case’ within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). As such, the case study design fits well with this research because sound interpretation of the research participants' experiences requires understanding the Egyptian context.

Research Site

This qualitative study is part of a larger research that aimed to examine both the nature and impacts of service-learning at a private higher education institution in the New Cairo area in Egypt, which was founded in 1919. At the time of data collection, the university enrolled 6,824 academic students, most of them (86.9 %) were Egyptians while 13.1 % were international students from around 90 countries. Of the total population, female students constituted 53.4% while male students constituted 46.6 %. The university offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, but undergraduate students (5244) outnumbered both graduate students (1259) and nondegree students (321). It has 423 full-time faculty members and 358 part-time faculty members with a faculty to student ratio of 1 to 11.4. English is the medium of instruction in this university. Through its mission, the university emphasizes lifelong learning, enhancing students' critical thinking skills and appreciation of responsibility for their society.

Unlike the overwhelming majority of universities in Egypt that involve students in community-based activities through extracurricular activities (Shalabi, 2017), the research site has an established service-learning program named Community-Based Learning (CBL) that supports faculty efforts to integrate community service in curricular offerings. The program formally started in 2008 with several key elements: alignment with course goal, community empowerment, reciprocity, and reflection. The university offers service-learning courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels and most of these courses are optional. Examples of these courses include Grant Writing through which students develop grant-writing proposals for their partnering community-based organizations to help them raise funds. Writing for Publications is another popular course that allow students opportunities to engage with community-based organizations and develop awareness of their causes and issues facing their beneficiaries.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sample was employed in this study. Patton (2015) noted that “the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: *information-rich cases*. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 53 emphasis in original). In purposive sampling, the number of cases is typically small and selection is based on expert judgment that is concerned with the depth of information generated by the cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2008). Informed by these guidelines, several selection criteria were established to inform the selection of the participants in this study. Given the purpose of the study, the main criterion for selecting participants was extensive involvement with the community through CBL courses to ensure that participants have rich experiences in this form of education. The program staff offered suggestions to the students with relatively extensive experience with the CBL. Including students with different life experiences and academic majors was another selection criterion to capture broader perspectives. Gender balance and accurate representation of the demographics of the student body within the university were the other criteria for selecting participants. As such, two men and two women were selected. Table 1 shows the profile of the research participants.

Table 1: Overview of the Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Academic Level	Major	Citizenship Status
Ashraf	Male	Senior	Electronic Engineering	Egyptian
Mahmoud	Male	Freshmen	Not declared	Egyptian
Duha	Female	Junior	Anthropology	Dual citizen: Egyptian and Austrian
Fadwa	Female	Sophomore	Political Science	U.S.

The participants were traditional undergraduate full-time college students ranged between 18 to 21 years old. Based on self-report, one of the participants, Ashraf, was a senior who majored in electronic engineering. This student came from a middle-class family and attended the university on a full scholarship. The second participant, Mahmoud, was a freshman and thus had not declared his major at the time of the study. This student lived abroad in Europe and North America almost half of his life. He belonged to an upper-middle income background. The third participant, Duha, was a junior who specialized in anthropology. Similar to Mahmoud, Duha was affluent in terms of financial status. Also, she spent a significant period of her life in Austria before moving to Egypt. The fourth student, Fadwa, was an African American who grew up in the state of Louisiana. Her passion for Islam and Arab culture led her to study Arabic for four years before coming to Egypt to pursue a bachelor’s degree.

Two of the participants were taking a service-learning course in the spring semester of 2011. One of them took three service-learning courses in earlier semesters while one had taken several courses with a community component and was actively involved in community service activities at the university. The time the participants spent in the community varied given their diverse experiences with service-learning courses, with an average of one to five service hours per week. The student participants partnered with local not-for-profit organizations serving multiple causes, such as poverty reduction, caring for street children, employment preparation, and nurturing the artistic senses and creativity of children and youth in marginalized communities. Students served these not-for-profit organizations in multiple roles, including planning professional development opportunities for recent graduates, planning and conducting activities with disadvantaged children and youth, and writing grant proposals to seek funding.

Unlike common young people in Egypt, the participants in this study are rather privileged either because of their affluent family backgrounds or their opportunity of attending an elite university on a full scholarship. Yet still, it is advantageous getting the engagement of these individuals in their communities and capturing their voices. Given the ingrained issues of classism and nepotism, among other social ills in Egypt, these students who represent an important segment of college students in Egypt are more likely to hold positions of power and access decision-making circles upon graduation than their counterparts without these privileges. Beyond their financial assets and the unfortunate current reality in Egypt, participants in this study are likely sheltered living in closed spaces where they mingle with like-privileged individuals with few to no opportunities to recognize the lifestyle and plights of other Egyptians. This study describes and discusses how the participants experienced their service-learning courses.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

Data were gathered through in-depth one-on-one interviews to gauge students' civic gains from participation in service-learning. Creswell (2009) noted that conducting interviews is useful when it is difficult to observe the participants directly. The use of this data collection method enables researchers to focus on the specific questions of interest and gain historical information from the participants. However, researchers should be mindful of the fact that such a technique provides indirect information filtered through the interviewees' perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes except one that lasted for almost three hours in two sessions. Interviews were recorded, and written notes were taken during the interviews. Scholars who are concerned with ethical practices in qualitative research encourage complete disclosure of the nature and goal of research with participants (Josselson, 2007). Yet others argued that qualitative researchers should strike a balance between disclosing the overall purpose of research and the need to unduly focus the participants' attention on the particular phenomenon under study (e.g., Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). With the latter ethical guidance in mind, this study was introduced to student participants as being intended to explore the overall impact of participation in service-learning on them rather than focusing on investigating civic outcomes in particular. This precaution contributes to the study's validity as it safeguards against participants' natural tendency to exaggerate their statements of civic gains if they had known that the researcher was particularly interested in exploring such outcomes. Additionally, content validity was obtained from three scholars in the field of service-learning and community engagement.

For data analysis, the notes taken during interviews were typed and recorded interviews were transcribed. Relevant data corpus was coded and then the codes were grouped into four categories based on Kirlin's (2003) scheme for civic skills: critical thinking, communication, collective decision-making, and organization. The next section presents the study's findings that pertain to this scheme along with evidential quotes.

Findings

The purpose of conducting this study was to explore the effect of participating in service-learning on civic gains for college students at a university in Egypt. As noted above, Kirlin's (2003) classification of civic skills was used as a guide in organizing the findings. However, as is clear from the findings discussed below, the skills described by the participants overlap in some instances in the sense that some skills may arguably fit into more than one of the categories

identified by Kirlin. Therefore, this scheme is employed mainly as a framework for organizing the findings.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is interpreted as analyzing conditions of political and civic life; evaluating, defending, taking positions on public events and issues; and thinking constructively about how to improve political and civic life (Patrick, 2003). Analyses revealed that students' engagement in service-learning courses pushed them to think critically about a wide array of civic aspects in Egyptian society, including government laws, working conditions of underserved groups, and one's privilege. For example, when Ashraf was asked if he learned anything about the social system through his service-learning courses, he responded positively, sharing the following story:

I went to a Fish Circle in Ismalia⁴. It's a place where fishermen go out and fish right from that pond directly fresh fish . . . then I interviewed them about the Balmotea⁵ life style—Where Balmotea go? Are they still alive? And then the conversation took us to so many other things like how they are very restricted in the work by the government laws. . . . Sometimes some of them were like “when we see police coming, we just try to escape as fast as possible because they [policemen] will come [to] take our stuff.” I was like why? I don't know the police is like that . . . So, many things you wouldn't have learned if you don't talk to people.

Significantly, Ashraf stressed that his direct communication with members of underserved groups was instrumental in pushing him to think critically about the government laws that regulate fishing and the working conditions of fisher people in Egypt. Responding to the question on whether service-learning courses led him to think about things that he had not necessarily thought about before taking these courses, Ashraf confirmed,

Definitely, the first couple of times I went to places [service sites], the first thing I thought of [was] where does all the money from tourism and the Suez Canal go? I really had no idea. I was like [these resources] do generate a lot of money. Where does it go? Why [are] these [impoverished] people living here?

As indicated by the above quotes, Ashraf exhibits an important cognitive civic skill which Patrick (2003) described as thinking critically about conditions of political and civic life. Similarly, in analyzing systems and structures that produce injustices, and raising suspicious questions about government spending, Ashraf demonstrates intellectual skills of citizenship and behaves as a justice-oriented citizen (Khane & Wetheimer, 1999).

In addition to taking positions on public issues, Ashraf's interactions with members of disadvantaged groups in his service sites urged him to become more cognizant of his own privileged socioeconomic status and the potential consequences that might have happened if he were a member of these groups. He expressed such thoughts noting, “And I definitely wondered about my own state of living. Thanks to Almighty God: What if I was born in that place? Was I going to be the same?!”

Similar to Ashraf, other participants referenced their service-learning courses as turning points that promoted their capacity to analyze and explain information about political and civic life. For example, Fadwa stated that her service-learning experiences challenged her

⁴ Ismalia is an Egyptian city overlooking the Suez Canal.

⁵ Balmotea refers to fisher people in Egyptian folklore.

preconceived notions concerning children as helpless without adults in the sense that they need a parent to take care of and provide the basic needs for them. She shared the following story:

Working with the street kids was an eye-opener because it was my first time to work with five- or six-year old who know more about the rest of the world than I did. I mean these kids have to grow up so fast and it was really depressing. But, it was also amazing to see how resilient we are as human beings. I mean people want to say human beings are inherently this or inherently that. And most people would assume that a six-year old child cannot take care of themselves. They need a mom or a dad or something. But, these kids are out every day finding a way to work so he [the street child] can buy a [piece of] bread or something so that he can survive on a day-to-day basis. And most of us don't have to go through that. So, this was also kind of profound. There is lots of stuff and I don't think that there hasn't been something that I've just set back and said, "Wow!" But, it just all kind come together slowly for me.

Significantly, Fadwa noted that she needed time to reconsider her assumptions and process the newfound beliefs about children's ability to live on their own and provide for themselves; this supports Wolcott and Lynch's (2001) view that transformative learning experiences seldom happen over the course of a semester. Rather, learners often need time to deconstruct past perspectives.

Fadwa provided additional indicators as to how her involvement in service-learning courses enhanced her critical thinking skills such that she started to criticize issues related to stereotypes and overgeneralizations. Her direct communication with people from different walks of life was a key element that enabled her to recognize commonalities between people regardless of visible differences. This idea was evidenced in the following quote:

These stereotypes—it doesn't matter what community you live in—and it's true because with CBL courses, you are able to overlook this and find the commonalities between people on people-to-people basis. You realize . . . just because you wear a scarf, it doesn't mean that you are any less feminine or any ideas, or stuff like that. So, by actually talking to people, you're able to deconstruct the stereotype and see these stereotypes because you've seen it, you've experienced it.

Significantly, Fadwa argued that the potential for service-learning courses to eliminate stereotypes should not be taken for granted. She noted that students' attitudes when entering the community play an instrumental role in affecting the likelihood of changing their preconceived notions; they become tolerant with differing viewpoints and understand better the complexity of the human life. She maintained that students who go to the community with the sole goal of completing a course assignment for a good grade are less likely to change while students who go to the community with genuine interest are better positioned to experience deep change through their experiences in the community. Fadwa explained,

I think it depends on the mindset of the person going into the community because if you're going in to do this as a schoolwork project, you don't have anything to learn. You just want to get your "A." Then you've already kind of preconceived your notion of what you are going to get in the community or what you want out of it. And so that way, it limits your interaction with people. I just want the grade. I am not interested in sitting in. But, there are other people [who] become more tolerant as they opened to these differences and it helps them not to embark on these generalizations like it is not easy to say people are popular, dirty and, thieves, and that sort of thing. You become more complex in your thinking or become aware of the shade of grey in every situation.

Another aspect of the critical thinking theme—thinking constructively about how to improve political and civic life (Patrick, 2003)—was evidenced by Mahmoud who said, “For me, this entire year at the university was just me trying to find out how can I do my part?” Further, Mahmoud reexamined his assumption of self-efficacy that evolved from the contributions he made in his service-learning course on grant writing. These contributions led him to develop an informed perspective of self-confidence and efficacy that he could effect positive change as a college student as opposed to his prior perception that he would not be able to make contributions until after graduation. Mahmoud exemplified this change noting,

At the beginning of this year I felt like I was not going to start making a difference until after I graduated and got some experience. Now, I feel there is a lot I can do to make change before I graduate while I am in the university because [university name] as a whole has a lot of opportunities for you to get involved: lots of clubs and organizations. . . . They [organization staff] don’t treat you like you’re a bunch of kids. They treat you like you’re a young adult with the potential to make a change. So, there were a lot of factors that made me change my views and CBL was one of them because I had no idea I could learn to write a grant at this point in my life.

Significantly, Mahmoud mentioned student engagement in extracurricular activities in the form of university-based clubs as another avenue for student involvement in their communities in addition to service-learning courses. Also, he expressed his satisfaction with the trust community-based organization staff had in service-learners, as exemplified in the way they dealt with them, as reliable adults rather than immature teenagers. This association between trust and communication is well documented in prior research (Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011). The communication theme is discussed in the following section.

Communication

Communication as a component of civic skills refers to writing, public speaking (Patrick, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), and overseeing public events and issues (Patrick). Participation in service-learning enabled students to recognize and connect with people from lower socioeconomic status. Through these experiences, the participants began to interact with several disadvantaged groups, such as street children and refugees, and learn how they live. Fadwa stressed how service-learning courses provided valuable opportunities for Egyptian and international students alike to communicate with underserved groups. She said:

“CBL courses have the opportunity to teach both international and Egyptian national students things about Egypt that they have never known before. And I think that’s amazing.” Fadwa went on illustrating how service-learning courses pushed Egyptian students to step out of their protected bubbles and recognize the miserable conditions of underserved groups. As evidenced in the following quote:

We had different meetings called the “Street Observations” where we go to Sharea⁶ El-Haram and all these places. We would walk around or sit and observe the children that the NGO had identified they didn’t have homes or walked around the street . . . So, upon doing that, we learned what I began to call “the street children etiquette” or “the rules of living on the street.” Because now after this class, . . . you learn if they [are] really homeless, if they’re not, all these things that you wouldn’t know without sitting on the street before. And especially the Egyptian students were like, “Wow! I cannot believe that . . . there is a whole other world going on here that I don’t see, that I don’t acknowledge, that I don’t pay attention to because I consider them beneath me.” The whole plight of somebody living on the street whether it’s a choice or not a choice. . . . So,

⁶ Sharea is the Arabic translation of street.

for them it was kind of taking a step back from living within their culture and being able to view them as “Wow! I overlook this every single day.”

Similarly, Fadwa explained that service-learning courses afforded foreign students the opportunity to connect with people different from the individuals with whom they interact on campus and communicate with marginalized groups that are typically overlooked. Fadwa noted,

For the foreigner . . . it was an opportunity for them to see an Egypt that is not in Zamalek⁷ or here [the affluent area of the university campus]. They get to know real Egyptians, see the plight of real Egyptians and on top of that get more information on the plight of street children. I mean that's a very specific group of people that is usually glazed over in textbooks and things like that.

Connecting with refugees was another example of how service-learning courses enabled students to deal with members of several disadvantaged groups and learn about the predicaments of fellow humans in the international society. Fadwa shared the following story:

I was teaching English with . . . an organization . . . [that] worked with students of refugees. One of our assignments was for the students to write a one-page essay on their favorite memory. Most of their memories were of Sudan and remembering when they left, when they were a child, or whether they were recent. But, their memories were always filled with a sense of mourning or regret because they had to leave [and] they couldn't go back. And they also, a lot of them, had a consensus that being here [in Egypt] they didn't feel that they could ever completely integrate into society because they're always kind of frowned upon because they're Sudanese. And that was interesting because when a lot of people study Egypt, nobody really talks about intercultural kind of problems. . . . Here are a lot of refugees how they interact and integrate within the Egyptian society and how they're accepted.

Fadwa's one-on-one interaction with these children promoted her understanding of the predicaments of refugees, leading her to call for action to raise awareness of this population and to promote multiculturalism to help refugees to have a better experience in Egypt. Moreover, taking service-learning courses allowed the participants valuable opportunities to develop persuasion skills essential to successful communication. As Duha said:

I had to write a fundraising letter. And I was appealing to people, telling them we want to fund this library. We need books and people want to learn and so forth. And then, I was reading it as if I was someone who would get the letter. And I was happy about it.

In this quote Duha described how through her service-learning course she developed the skill of persuasive arguments in the form of letter-writing to seek funding for a library facility to serve an impoverished community in Cairo.

Collective Decision-Making

The collective decision-making category of civic skills includes teamwork (Boyte, 2000), decision-making (Morgan & Streb, 2001), collaboration between citizens to promote personal and common interests (Patrick, 2000, 2003), identifying and solving public problems (Battistoni, 1997), and taking others' perspectives into account (Hurtado, Engber, Ponjuan, & Landrewman, 2002). Service-learning courses provided students avenues to work collaboratively with fellow students and community partners on projects serving the public good. Duha shared an example of how her service-learning course allowed her to experience significant growth in terms of

⁷ Zamalek is an affluent neighborhood in Cairo

developing collaboration skills, addressing a public issue, shouldering responsibility, and tackling challenges. As evidenced in the following quote:

We're building a library and learning center in Old Cairo right now in a poor neighborhood and only the organization that's behind it. And how you [service-learning students] plan everything and . . . the factors that you need to consider that are for the whole process to work is just incredible. And I'm sure it's very different to do in Cairo than do it let's say in New York or in Japan. . . . Our work of my partner and me from that course is to write the grant proposal for them [the organization staff] so they can get the funding for it [the library facility] . . . to get the money for this project. One of the hardest tasks was to find a funder because you need to write to a certain sponsor.

Significantly, students spoke of how their service-learning experiences helped them feel empathetic with others from different backgrounds and develop perspective-taking skills. In this regard, Fadwa noted that her interaction with people with different life styles than her own was instrumental in raising her capacity to identify the reasons behind disputes spreading in the global world. She came to realize that specifying certain rules and imposing them by hegemonic power onto the rest of the world gives rise to misunderstanding and conflicts between nations with different customs and traditions. In the quote below, Fadwa emphasized that her service-learning courses afforded her opportunities to meet with different people and understand that rules (whether economic, social, or political) that may work in a specific society might not necessarily be appropriate in another culture given the differences between communities. This recognition led Fadwa to feel empathetic with people in developing countries; she called for respect for the unique characteristics of every community and abolishing the idea of imposing universal rules. As evidenced in Fadwa's words:

I think that that the CBL courses help you to understand people from different walks of life. First of all, it's important for me personally because I aspire for everybody to be happy and I don't believe that everybody in the world is going to be happy by posting up an international board of rules that is written by some old White man in England when it doesn't apply to a sixteen-year old woman in India, or anything like that. And it's also important to me as a political science student because I am interested in forming policy and all of the wars and social problems, I guess, that we are having today have to do, especially in the Middle East, I think, with foreign interference and people being forced to be something that they're not. . . . And so, I would say that that's the most important part of CBL . . . is that you get to actually learn about people who you might have never got in contact before.

The above quote suggests that Fadwa attained "political tolerance" which Mutz (2002) defined as formalizing ways in which people agree to disagree, noting that exposure to different perspectives helps develop tolerance of different perspectives.

Meeting different people through service-learning courses not only helped the participants become empathetic with these people, but also developed perspective-taking skills. Students' affluent socioeconomic status and the location of the university campus in a relatively remote area, among other factors, isolate students from interacting with other groups in society, especially those from lower socioeconomic classes. Participation in service-learning, however, pushed students out of their comfort zone and introduced them to underserved people that they do not typically take into account. As students began to develop rapport with members of these disadvantaged groups, they started to acknowledge them, understand their living conditions, and appreciate their needs. As illustrated by Fadwa's words:

Some kind of way service-learning courses by forcing you out of your norm and you think of things from other lens, you remember that when you're thinking or formulating opinions on other things. So, even if the teacher didn't say you should vote for a law that gives street children rights. If such a law were to be proposed, you having experienced this [interacting with street children] might think about this law in a different way than you would have before taking the class. . . . You begin to take others into consideration, may be you wouldn't by default because a lot of times people formulate their political orientation or whatever, it's about what *I* want and *me*.

As indicated in the above quote, participation in service-learning may enable students to recognize groups with different lifestyles than their own, which leads them to take these groups into consideration when formulating their opinions about proposed laws as opposed to thinking merely about the effect these laws have on them.

Organization

The organization category of civic skills encompasses organizing, project management and responsibility shouldering (Morgan & Streb, 2001), planning strategies (Boyte 2000, Patrick, 2000), participating in meetings in which decisions are made, coping skills (Verba et al., 1995), and taking action to improve political and civic life (Patrick, 2000). As described by the participants, service-learning courses presented students with opportunities to take action and make strategic plans to improve life conditions for the underserved. Here is an illustrative quote by Ashraf:

We had a deal with the community school to re-enroll the kids and we started raising funds for it. In our plan, we had English teaching for graduate men so that they could enhance their job opportunities and get better money, computer classes, and everything. But, then when we started, we thought we shouldn't start everything because if we start too big, we probably would not sustain the amount of projects we have. So, we thought we will start small and then start growing. We did a children project where we gathered the children who are supposed to be on the street in the NGO that we worked with in Doeka⁸ on Friday, and we started teaching them really simple ethics, like morals, and everything. And then, we started visiting the houses . . . to look for people who don't have jobs or have kids that skipped school and start acting upon it.

Ashraf's words show that service-learning projects led him and his fellow classmates to think strategically, organize their efforts, and make long-term plans to make a positive difference in a poor neighborhood.

Additionally, the participants noted that their service-learning courses afforded them opportunities to attend meetings where they planned their service-learning projects. As referenced in Mahmoud's words:

It [service-learning course] gets you a lot more involved in what you're doing. For example, when we went to our first meeting, . . . we met with the executive director and she sat down with us and told us real-life stories about their work. The NGO basically works with educating children in the region, teaching them to be more open-minded by embracing the arts. So, she told us personal anecdotes about children she had worked with and stories about how they changed.

Likewise, Duha described how this experience allowed her to gain personal growth through shouldering responsibilities and addressing difficulties. As evidenced in her words:

⁸ Doeka is an impoverished neighborhood in Cairo.

One of the hardest tasks was to find a funder because you need to write to a certain sponsor. . . the best way to do that is to talk to people and get a connection. But, I don't know anyone. I mean I know, but they are not in Egypt. So, I finally found something online that was a PDF file with all funders for different things listed!

Similar to the other participants, Mahmoud referenced developing a sense of responsibility and enhanced ability to handle difficulties during his service-learning experience. In the quote below, he described how he felt responsible for getting the project done not only for course grade, but also for satisfying the community-based organization need for a funding proposal. Further, he pinpointed accommodating meeting times with the organization's staff as a challenge that he had to manage. Mahmoud shared the following insight:

The fact that it's not just our grade that depends on this, but we know that it's also the institution; they [staff] trust us to write this proposal for them. So, knowing that I have a deadline in three weeks; they're going to be asking for this proposal. . . . Making arrangements to meet with the NGO outside of our hours . . . is a bit harder, especially considering that my schedule is very inconvenient.

Duha explained how her service-learning experience was helpful in allowing her to understand and cope with Egyptian culture, enabling her to better function in this culture. She shared the following testimony:

So, I got to know the Egyptian culture a lot by working [in the community], like how to handle things. . . . I'm not saying that I know how to do it now without any help. I'm just saying that I understand that . . . you can't only have an idea and hardworking people. You also need to know the ways of how things are done.

As reflected in her words, Duha's involvement in the community through her service-learning courses enabled her to gain a new founding belief that recognizing how things operate in a society is essential to effecting positive change in that society in addition to having thoughtful ideas and committed individuals. A discussion of the findings along with recommendations for practice and research are presented in the subsequent sections.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to understand how participation in service-learning affects college students' civic skills in Egypt. In support of developing college students' civic skills, Newman (1985) argued, "the most central demand is to restore to higher education its original purpose of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship. . . . The advancement of civic learning, therefore must become higher education's most central goal" (p. xiv). Given the profound changes Egypt undergoes at the current time, exploring ways to develop college students' civic skills becomes critically important to empower them to take part in shaping the future of the country. Participants' aforementioned quotes demonstrate a range of civic gains from service-learning courses, but share a common emphasis on how interacting with people from different backgrounds was instrumental to enabling them to attain these gains. This is consistent with Dewey's (1938) emphasis on the centrality of experience to civic education. These repeated comments urge higher education professionals wanting to maximize students' civic learning outcomes to design service-learning courses in a way that allows students frequent interactions with diverse communities.

While several scholars noted that civic engagement includes both political and nonpolitical actions (e.g., Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003), students in this study

rarely mentioned political skills. Rather, most of their comments referred to apolitical forms of civic skills, reflecting the current state of alienating young people from participation in politics in Egypt. Significantly, participants' voices reflect their happiness and excitement about engaging in the community. Such feelings may be understood in light of the very limited opportunities available for college students to participate in public life and effect change in Egypt. The prevailing culture in Egypt is responsible in part for youth disengagement. The Egyptian culture overestimates the experience that comes with seniority at the expense of other qualifications exhibited by youth, such as talent, energy, and novelty. The manifestation of this cultural perception is most pronounced in the appointments of leadership positions in the government sector, which are typically held by seniors. Reform is critically and urgently needed in Egypt to correct this biased structure that puts young people on the margin and limits their contributions. Reform efforts should raise awareness of the potential of young people to make significant contributions for the development of their society. Reformers should cultivate a new culture in Egypt that validates the capabilities of young people in addition to appreciating elders' wisdom and experience. Besides raising awareness of the potential of youth for leading positive change, affording youth tangible opportunities to engage in public life and address challenges facing their communities is an indispensable step for paving the way to building an equal-opportunity society in Egypt, which is essential for social justice.

Given Egyptian higher education mission of satisfying community needs (Supreme Council of Egyptian Universities, 2016), higher education leaders should initiate and promote these reform efforts. Through institutionalizing academic service-learning in public universities in Egypt, higher education professionals could offer college students structured opportunities within the curriculum to get involved in their society and effect positive social change. Recognizing the positive difference that young people could make in their communities during their collegiate years would help create positive perceptions of youth abilities and potential which would hopefully lead to a cultural shift that entrusts young people and affords them leadership roles through which they could effect positive change in society.

Conclusion

The study's findings should be considered with some limitations in mind. The small sample of this study may have introduced bias into the data collected in the sense that the views of the participants may not sufficiently reflect the breadth of other students' experiences. However, the sample still mirrors the demographic characteristics of the student body and the rich data generated from the participants help compensate the small number. Future research with bigger sample size that reflects a wider multiplicity of students' opinions could eliminate this limitation. The fact that this study was conducted at one university is another limitation. Collecting data from various types of institutions is a recommended step to triangulate the findings and show the effect of institutional type on students' views, if any. A third limitation is that the effect of service-learning on students' civic skills was investigated through their own perceptions. Capturing students' voices as a marginalized group in Egypt is crucial to recognizing their needs and advancing justice. Yet, future research should also consider exploring the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as faculty and community-based professionals, regarding their perceived impacts of service-learning experience on students' civic skills. Collecting data from multiple stakeholders are more likely to render well-rounded pictures about the gains associated with student participation in service-learning. It is also important to note that the intent of this study was to investigate students' civic gains from service-learning, and thus the discussion focused on

exploring these gains. Yet, future research should take into consideration the ethical dilemmas that could arise from community-based learning. Faculty members wanting to engage their students in this type of education should cultivate opportunities for them to grappling with ethical dilemmas. Informing future research with the ethical issues arising from community-based learning would alert academicians to the importance of establishing sound university-community relationships and ultimately boost the capacity of the scholarship of engagement to achieve its goal of strengthening communities.

Despite these limitations, the study makes significant contributions. First, it reinforces previous research findings concerning students' civic gains from participation in service-learning (e.g., Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Second, the study's findings present salient examples in the voice of a population of students who are rarely heard in the literature, which is important for advancing the needs of this marginalized group thus furthering justice. Third, the study advances knowledge base on the effects of service-learning in Eastern settings, thus addressing the dearth of literature in this area in non-Western contexts. Although this study is an important step towards correcting the bias for Western settings in extant literature, still research on college students and service-learning in Eastern contexts particularly in the Arab World lags significantly behind what is known about the scholarship of engagement in the U.S. and other Western countries. To help void this bias in the literature, more research in Eastern contexts is critically needed. Scholars, particularly those who are native to underrepresented cultural groups, are encouraged to unveil aspects of engaged scholarship in their cultures. Advancing knowledge base in various regions of the world is advantageous in that it could help identify different models of engagement, present best practices, and show the effect of the cultural context on service-learning. Additionally, the availability of literature on service-learning in different parts of the globe may strengthen comparative studies in the field.

The study discussed how service-learning may be used to realize the goals of critical pedagogy with respect to education as liberatory (Freire, 2000). As illustrated in the findings, participating in service-learning afforded students opportunities to learn about "other" Egyptians' situations, way of living, interests, suffering, needs, fears, ambitions, and hopes. In doing so, it helped them develop "moral obligation" to the other which "requires learning about their interests and situations" (Jefferess, 2008, p. 32). Taking part in services-learning made students aware of the suffering of common Egyptians and evoked them to think critically about government practices towards the poor. Students' quotes also suggest that they started to develop global citizenship skills by adopting "a global perspective that allows one to see the experience of the local community as interconnected with the experiences of others around the world" (Jefferess, p. 29).

While student participation in this services-learning experience may not fully embody the transformative nature of critical pedagogy, it is still a positive engaging pedagogical intervention especially with the limited engagement opportunities for young people in the Egyptian context. Additionally, student engagement in the local community through service-learning could be a type of education that produces "discomfort" as characterized by Andreotti (2016). To take service-learning to the next level such that it truly exemplifies critical pedagogy, it should be designed to "re-orient[s] the focus of making a difference towards asking open-ended questions about power, privilege, redistribution, and the reproduction of complexity in systemic harm" (Andreotti, p. 107). This orientation shift is especially effective in stimulating students' thinking about the structural causes of inequalities and solutions that redress injustices rather than

instrumental solutions of monetary and other types of momentarily assistance offered by students on an individual basis or collectively in service-learning courses.

Appiah (2005) argued that ethical action begins not with what we can do to “help,” but with understanding why people are suffering. For service-learning to become a truly ethical and empowering learning experience, it should include structured opportunities to engage students in critical questions about systematic and societal structures that give rise to injustices. Examples of these questions include, why is poverty a serious challenge in Egypt? (although it is ranked as a middle-income country by the World Bank (Rizk, 2019). Over half of the population lives under the poverty line in upper Egypt (as cited in Rizk). What causes the big discrepancy in resources among different geographic regions in the country? What hinders upward social mobility for educated people in Egypt? Informed by Jefferess’ insights (2008), such questions could go even deeper and get students to think critically about their privilege and how it may relate to the distressing situations of the people whom they encounter in the community. In addition to cultivating structured opportunities for critical discussions, the continuity of service-learning courses is pivotal in building collective awareness and sustainable movement for social justice on university campuses. The ongoing critical engagement of students in their communities could gradually move them beyond acts of benevolence to systemic effort for social change.

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