

CLEANING DRAINS AND ROADSIDES TOGETHER: EFL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS ENACTING SERVICE-LEARNING

Md. Mozaffor Hossain

Assistant Professor & Program Coordinator, Department of English, Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT: *Service-learning tasks practiced by EFL teachers and learners are rare phenomena in Bangladesh. In fact, the lessons of service-learning haven't been integrated into the EFL classrooms in Bangladesh so far. Consequently, it is obvious that teachers and learners in this field are not seen performing community welfare services anywhere in the country. I have been teaching English at university level for the last 10 years and have had no experience of the incorporation of service-learning and EFL teaching and learning in Bangladeshi context, which made me think and inspired me to begin with the good idea. With only little theoretical knowledge, I started talking on service-learning and motivating my students about it, which many of them responded to from a sense of civic responsibility. Subsequently, I presented the idea of actuating the knowledge of service-learning, and together we chose to clean drains and roadsides in Khulna City in Bangladesh. This article describes how we accomplished the task together and what we felt about it.*

KEYWORDS: Service-learning, Cleaning, Together, EFL Teacher, EFL Learner.

INTRODUCTION

There is a general scarcity of consciousness and implementation of preserving clean and healthy environment among the people in Bangladesh, which I, being a responsible citizen of the country, can very honestly acknowledge. A lot of people everyday throw their waste materials and household rubbish into the drains or beside the roads and street or around the corner. One taking banana or orange is very frequently seen to throw the peel on the walkway or anywhere. Scores of environment polluting tasks like these scare me day in and day out, which is why I resorted to service learning that necessarily helps people to be pro-environment and pro-community. In this regard, Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2013) believe that service learning is a major educational revolution that can create better citizenship. Although the teaching of service learning has been integrated into the EFL/ESL classrooms of many countries, like the USA (Steinke, 2007), Turkey (Celik, Aytin & Bayram, 2013), Iran (Azizinezhad, Darvishi & Hashemi, 2013) etc., it has remained a rare phenomenon in the EFL classrooms of Bangladesh.

In addition, Bangladesh possesses a huge number of students and teachers, who are engaged in English language learning and teaching in almost all the levels of education, which ensures a considerable possibility for them to be associated in accomplishing community-oriented tasks at a greater magnitude. Hence, EFL teachers and learners in the country can contribute substantially if they incorporate service-learning inside and outside the classrooms. This is more prospective and promising in case of tertiary-level EFL teachers and students, for they are in a position to feel and effectuate their duties and responsibilities from a more structurally

developed platform. Moreover, Steinke (2007) reassures that generally the EFL learners who get involved with people in various community and culture related tasks become exposed to more opportunities and feelings to practice and assimilate the target language.

Bandy (2017) apprehends that our world faces alarming challenges that require especially the students to become efficient leaders with extensive knowledge of public life, refined skills of transformative thinking and the capabilities to join disparate groups to overcome problems and be the change makers. With the same motto, service-learning involves any educational institute along with the community to foster civic responsibility by integrating community service programs into the academic curriculum (EPA, 2011). Accordingly, I attempted to enact service-learning into a couple of EFL courses that I taught in the university for the purpose of having the students connect knowledge and pragmatism. Bradley, et al (2017) emphasize that present generation students must link the knowledge of the academic courses with real life situations to be able to make meaningful connection between theory and practice.

Among many possible scopes of providing essential service to the environment and people, I along with my students chose to clean the roadsides and drains around the university campus and in the city. I basically followed Stepath's (2010) example in the paper, "Marine Debris Clean-ups as Meaningful Science Learning", where the author shows one of the practical applications of service-learning, which is a marine debris clean-up project that promoted inquiry-based learning by integrating community welfare tasks into meaningful learning contexts. In addition, in the article titled "Enhancing Learning by Integrating Theory and Practice" Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) insist that teachers intending to make teaching effective as well as serve the community must motivate the learners towards service-learning and lead them to the pragmatic community service activities, which inspired me a great deal to undertake the task of cleaning the surroundings together.

Research Objectives

National Geographic Society (2017) suggests various ideas to engage the learners in field-based environmental service-learning, one of which is to partner with local river or watershed association to clean up a local stream, river or other body of water in the community in order to make it hygienic for people and wildlife. This idea inspired me to undertake such a cleaning job that I being concerted with my students can perform in the city community to serve as well as increase awareness. Similarly, in addition to introducing the lessons of service learning among the EFL learners in Bangladesh, this study aims to reach the following objectives:

- (i) If incorporation of service-learning into the EFL classroom in Bangladesh is a possible phenomenon.
- (ii) How the EFL learners in Bangladesh accept and implement the knowledge of service-learning.
- (iii) What sense of duty and responsibility the EFL learners attain due to engaging in community and social welfare tasks together with the EFL teacher.
- (iv) What target language benefit the EFL learners can obtain owing to getting involved in service-learning effectuation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

United States Environmental Protection Agency, EPA (2011) defines service-learning to be a method of encouraging students' learning and development through active participation in consciously arranged task that is implemented in, and fulfills the need of the community. Cone and Harris (1996) say that service-learning has dramatically brought affirmative changes to the American educational scene in the last two decades, and new academicians are greatly adopting the approaches of connecting traditional classroom-based instruction with community service. Practitioners of service learning suggest that before taking the learners to the fields where they can engage in doing community service, the assignments have to be defined to them clearly, and each and every participant has to be briefed about his/her stipulated task, which in turn will help to keep the students disciplined (Cone & Harris, 1996). Mathews (2017) pints out that classrooms work as the think tanks for theory, ethics and philosophy, but to accomplish expectations and experiments, participating actions and problem-solving attempts have to be materialized in the real-life world outside the classrooms. Accordingly, to pragmatize the objectives of service-learning, the pedagogical frameworks in the academies need to be formulated in such a manner that allows a two-way curriculum having motivation in the classrooms and effectuation in the community (Mathews, 2017).

Though the literature in the field of service-learning connected with English language teaching is still limited (Falasca, 2017), Rahman (2012) asserts that service-learning knowledge influences positively on the active engagement of the English language teachers and learners into serving the community, and thereby demonstrating a practical efficacy of earned knowledge. Falasca (2017) considers the practice of service-learning among the EFL instructors and learners as a "good practice" that connects them with the real life problems and their solutions in a meaningful way. For the purpose, EFL teachers and learners have to practice and improve language awareness not only in the classrooms but also in the outside world where they can ensure welfare activities to the community and as such send good messages to the people in general (Rahman, 2012). The planning regarding the welfare activities for the community as parts of the application of service-learning would involve identifying the existing problems and concerns in the society firstly. Then these issues have to be sorted out placing the most pressing one in the first place and moving onward to solve it on priority (Mathews, 2017).

Youth Service America, YSA (2009) prioritizes 55 service-learning projects, one of which is Beach Cleanup that goes closely in line with cleaning drains and roadsides in the city where waste materials are rampant. Stepath (2010) argues that through cleaning venture, students get a chance to learn and apply the practical knowledge in a real world situation to improve the environment where they live. Besides, teaching the learners to effectuate knowledge and skills for benefiting others or serving the public welfare is a commendably influential approach to nurture service-learning proficiencies in academic disciplines (Bandy, 2017). Furthermore, a well-designed experiential course curriculum promotes learning of the course contents and enhances problem solving, integrative thinking and high order reasoning skills (Bradley, et al, 2017).

Banerjee (2008) emphasizes that service-learning is an effective way of learning practically for the university students in Bangladesh which is a very fertile land to practice and implement community betterment jobs. As a matter of fact, service-learning works as a transformative tool that advocates volunteer work to enhance academic experience in the context of Bangladesh (Banerjee, 2008). Nonetheless, Bangladesh so far has experienced infrequent service-learning

engagement effectuated by teachers and students. And, in case of the EFL classrooms, service-learning has heretofore remained an unknown and unpracticed issue.

Method

In fact, for the cleaning venture, we followed the Beach Cleanup Project suggested by Youth Service America, YSA (2009) which instruct the students to team up with other youths to organize a beach-cleanup day in a nearby beach community, where they have to retrieve the liters, dispose them in the certain dumping location, and inspire others not to litter public places. The study followed a qualitative research method which included teaching students service-learning, leading them to the cleaning venture and inspiring them to write their experience and thoughts on the task. In the class sessions, the students regularly received and learnt lessons relating to service-learning. Then I motivated them to apply the knowledge practically and accomplish writing tasks about it. I clarified the fact that they would receive marks on their active participation in the drains and roadsides cleaning venture, which will be added to their cumulative grade point average. During and after the cleaning drive, I observed the engagement and exposure of the participants closely, which I would elucidate in the findings of the study. In the classes after the event, I asked them to write about how they felt and what they thought about the assignment. Their feedbacks regarding such application of service-learning would be considered as the required data for this research. As for myself as a teacher, it was my first experience of cleaning public areas and carrying the wastes to the dustbins.



Figure-1: Teacher and students cleaning drains and roadsides together.

Data Collection

The study did not aim to gather any quantitative data, which is why no questionnaire was provided to the participants to reach anything numerical. It rather focused on attaining the overall motivation and awareness of the participants in relation to the impact and efficacy of service learning. Accordingly, in the classes after the cleaning session, I asked them to write

about their feeling, experience and expectations about the community drive they concertedly executed.

Participants

I applied the lessons on service-learning in three EFL batches having around sixty students in total. I encouraged and demanded all of them to join the attempt to actualize the knowledge through launching a big cleaning drive around the university campus and in the city. In addition to the students, the session was participated by two security officers and a staff cleaner from the university, and a van driver from the municipality to assist the community welfare initiative.

Instruments

For teaching service-learning, the study made use of related contents and stories. Mostly, it utilized the multiple practices of service-learning in the academic set-ups of the developed countries. In addition, texts and writings relating to the applications of service-learning were downloaded and talked about with the learners in the class sessions. As to the venture for cleaning drains and roadsides in the city, we used quite a number of things. We needed around twenty brooms, twenty shovels, twenty baskets, sixty pairs of hand gloves and one waste carrying van. We also utilized a hand mike to lead and instruct the participants to do the needful.

Findings

In the class sessions, as I presented instances and stories about service-learning, some of the students seemed to be interested while some a bit confused. When I proposed to them the implementation of one of the ventures relating to service-learning in public, many of them demonstrated visible excitement whereas many remained passive. However, while working practically, we could feel a strong bond of fraternity and oneness among ourselves. Each helped the other and exploited every sense of responsibility, which manifested the true beauty of service-learning.

Subsequently, in the classes, I asked the participants to write on what they learnt and how they felt. In fact, I could better understand the findings regarding the feelings of the participants on the cleaning attempt when I was reading their writings. Some went through a kind of hesitation as to whether or not they would take broom and basket up and start picking up rubbish from the roadsides and drains, while some were wondering what other people would think about them. By contrast, majority of the participants spontaneously obtained the expected lessons from the community task, which means; they felt responsible and could realize the imperativeness of such initiatives to be executed by themselves for the good of the society and the nation as a whole.

Another worthwhile phenomenon took place after the event, which is relating to the photos of the teacher and students collectively doing the service with shovels, brooms and baskets in hands, which were effusively posted on social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter. These postings got shared on many friends' timelines and received a huge number of appreciating likes and comments, which encouraged both the teacher and students in a big manner.

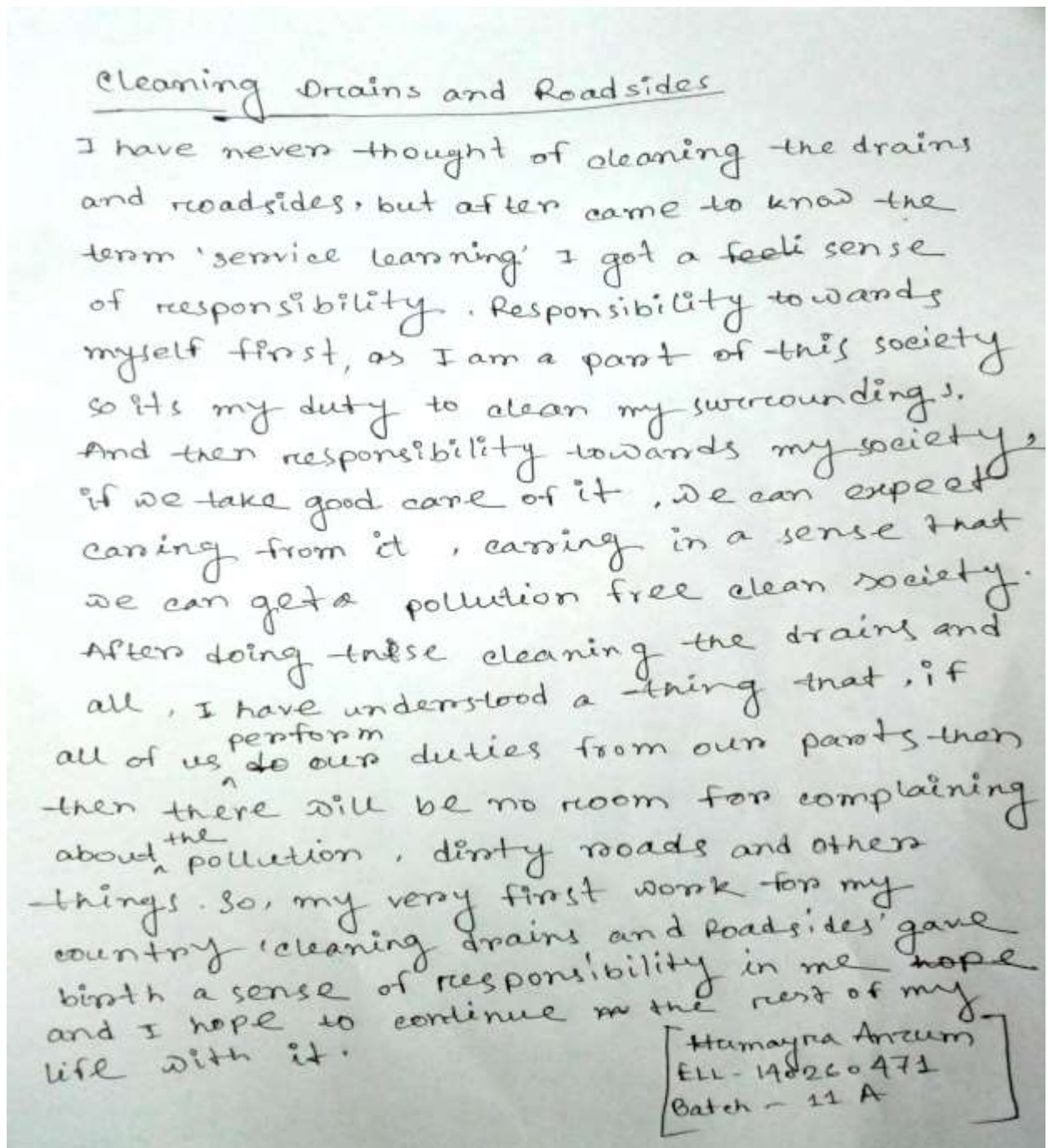


Figure-2: One student's feedback regarding the cleaning task.

Limitations

There were some explicit as well as implicit limitations in the arrangement and implementation of the study. The obstacle that I encountered at the beginning was about convincing the learners that the cleaning task is actually everybody's responsibility, for students in Bangladesh are hardly taught and found to clean up public places. It is quite unusual in the country that teachers lead the students to outside to clean sewerage drains and sweep waste materials from the roadsides. Nevertheless I discussed examples of such activities from developed countries, and succeeded in inspiring them to positively engage in doing such jobs. Additionally, as this sort

of task and demonstration is not in practice, it was a bit difficult for me to make the university authority understand the purpose and thereby attain their permission to take the students to public places. Moreover, having the necessary tools at disposal was another hard task, which needed some extra support from the staff of the university.

Recommendations

For a teacher, on his own responsibility and expense, this kind of momentous task is difficult to some extent. Hence, the whole institute needs to take the onus to organize such welfare activities. Institutions have to come forward to support with monetary and infrastructural regards. On my personal capability, I could not afford to provide the participants with any uniform T-shirt having any slogan or something that would unite them more convincingly and send a loud message to the community people. Considering the goodness of the applications of service-learning, it should be encouraged and implemented not only from individual perspective but also from bigger platform. Moreover, some students were more interested in clicking photos and selfies than the cleaning task sincerely, albeit simply from a sense of fun, they should spontaneously be more attentive to the seriousness of the task.

CONCLUSION

Given the absence of the practice of service-learning among both the teachers and students of Bangladesh, a sort of inertia worked in them initially about what other people would think and say. But, when the participants found themselves doing a good and essential job unitedly, they felt quite confident and happy. Besides, passersby and people around were visibly interested in watching the concerted task being performed by teacher and students, which they were also appreciating audibly. In the next couple of days, when the participants found news and column regarding their cleaning venture published in the local dailies, they obviously felt encouraged and appreciated. Later on in the classrooms and at the campus, the students are found to be quite responsive towards their unspoken contributions to keeping their surroundings clean. Furthermore, in relation to any community-related resourcefulness, like helping poor people with warm clothes in winter or providing relief fund to the flood affected people or feeding the street children, the students are seen to participate willingly.

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