Service Learning in Russia: Scoping Review

Vladimir S. Nikolskiy – Dr. Sci. (Philosophy), Prof., Chief Editor of the Journal of "Higher Education in Russia", SPIN-code: 7196-8065, ORCID: 0000-0002-4290-1443, v.s.nikolskij@mospolytech.ru
Moscow State Polytechnic University, Moscow, Russian Federation
Address: 38, B. Semenovskaya str., Moscow, 107023, Russian Federation
HSE University, Moscow, Russian Federation
Address: 11 Pokrovsky bulvar, 109028, Moscow, Russia

Abstract. Over the past few years, the Service-learning approach has been increasingly introduced into the practice of Russian higher education institutions. Thereby researchers begin to take an active interest in this topic, and number of publications on service-learning in the Russian context is growing. We are witnessing the emergence of a new area of educational research in our country. Under these circumstances, it is necessary to evaluate the successes in scientific knowledge, identify the existing gaps, and develop a programme for further research on service learning in our country. This circumstance determined the author's interest in this topic and the choice of methodology in favour of a systematic review of the subject field. As a result, the author was able to identify an array of relevant publications, reconstruct the subject field, and identify seven main themes that have been covered to varying degrees in the literature: 1) specificity of the approach; 2) civicism formation; 3) application of reflective practices; 4) use of an evidence-based approach; 5) conceptualization; 6) external partners; and 7) the role of the teacher. The content analysis of the materials made it possible to identify the main characteristics of the publication array, identify lacunas and propose a programme of further research.

Keywords: service-learning, higher education, experiential learning, scoping development

Обучение служением в России: становление предметного поля

Никольский Владимир Святославович – д-р филос. наук, проф., гл. редактор журнала «Высшее образование в России», SPIN-code: 7196-8065, ORCID: 0000-0002-4290-1443, v.s.nikolskij@mospolytech.ru
Московский политехнический университет, г. Москва, Россия
Адрес: 107023, г. Москва, ул. Б. Семёновская, 38
Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», г. Москва, Россия
Адрес: 109028, г. Москва, Покровский б-р., 11

Аннотация. Последние несколько лет подход «Обучение служением» (Service Learning) всё активнее внедряется в практику российских высших учебных заведений. Вслед за этим растёт интерес исследователей к этой теме и число публикаций, посвящённых обучению служением в российских условиях. На наших глазах происходит становление нового направления образовательных исследований в нашей стране. В сложившихся условиях необходимо оценить успехи в научном познании, определить имеющиеся пробелы и разработать программу дальнейших исследований обучения служением в нашей стране. Это обстоятельство обусловило наш интерес к данной теме и выбор методологии в пользу систематического обзора предметного поля. В результате нам удалось выявить массив релевантных публикаций, провести реконструкцию предметного поля и выявить семь основных тем, имеющих ключевое значение для понимания обучения служением: 1) специфика подхода, 2) развитие гражданственности, 3) применение рефлексивных практик, 4) использование доказательного подхода, 5) концептуализация, 6) внешние партнёры, 7) роль преподавателя. Содержательный анализ материалов позволил определить основные характеристики публикационного массива, выявить лакуны и предложить направления дальнейших исследований.

Ключевые слова: обучение служением, высшее образование, экспериментальное обучение, обзор предметного поля

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Introduction

Service-learning is a new area of pedagogical practice in Russian higher education as well as a new area in Russian educational research. The author uses the term "service learning" to refer to the relevant practice, pedagogical approach and subject research area. This approach was firstly mentioned in Russian publications as early as 2006 in the methodological materials collection [1].

By now, a significant array of foreign publications containing theoretical basis and empirical evidence of effectiveness [2], as well as generalisation of the results obtained as systematic reviews [3] has been accumulated. Service-learning is commonly understood as a special

pedagogical approach that combines academic education and the solution of socially important tasks by students, i.e., achieving the goals of the educational programme by engaging students for solving the real social problems [4]. At the same time, service-learning is recognised as a special type of experiential learning, that is different from volunteership and internship [3], or rather it is placed on a continuum, where the extremes are volunteership as voluntary service to society and internship as professional skills development [5].

Service-learning as a subject area for research provides, in Elizabeth Hollander's words, a "safe space" [6] for questions not only about the aims and outcomes of this approach, but also about its limitations and limits of its applicability [7]. At the present time, when service-learning is being widely introduced into the Russian higher education[1], the research community, as the author believes, can form an evidence base that will enable it to be critically examined for improvement and development.

There are several questions that should be answered at the very beginning of the present article. If there are a lot of foreign publications, why should we conduct domestic research and why should we not trust foreign scientific data? There are several answers to these questions.

Firstly, the data available in the published literature are obtained in other cultural and historical environment, which differs significantly from the Russian one. Basic theoretical publications were issued in the 1990s, while empirical publications date back to the early 2000s. It is easy to notice that the social context of the USA, Spain, South Africa or China in different decades has its own specificity, which can have a significant impact on the results. What might this specificity be? First of all, service learning involves interaction between universities and the so-called third sector of the economy, i.e. various non-profit organisations that solve various social tasks, and the development level of the third sector differs from country to country.

Secondly, higher education systems of different countries have noticeable differences in man-

agement, content and pedagogical approaches. Therefore, implementing the approach in these diverse contexts may have varied outcomes.

Thirdly, the main actors in different cultures have different educational experiences. This difference may, for example, be related to the culture of writing, the culture of speaking one's thoughts and experiences aloud in group discussions. In service-learning, written or oral reflection of experiences is seen as a key factor influencing the outcome.

Finally, fourth, service-learning is closely related to the project-based education and volunteering. Both have had a significant impact on higher education and society in Russia only in the last decade.

Thus, while numerous studies support the outcomes of service-learning practices [8], there is a lack of relevant evidence in the Russian national and cultural context.

We are currently witnessing the emergence of a new field in Russian educational research. A series of publications is beginning to form, the first results have been obtained, but in order to move forward it is necessary to summarise the intermediate results, assess the development of this topic, identify gaps in the domestic literature and build a programme of further research.

Thus, the aim of the present study is to identify what is known about service-learning in the Russian context, to identify and to analyse in detail the gaps in academic publications, and to suggest areas for future research.

The paper is structured as follows. First, there is the methodology section, which presents the theoretical framework of the study and reflects the research strategy used. This is followed by the "Results" section, which presents the main characteristics of the body of publications according to the thematic areas identified. The sections "Discussion", "Conclusions" and "Recommendations" are combined into one section, which shows how the research is embedded in the scientific discourse, how it contributes to the development of scientific knowledge, as well as drawing general conclusions and suggesting research questions for future research efforts.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

Many service learning researchers cite John Dewey's philosophy of education and David Kolb's experiential learning theory as the theoretical framework [9]. Additionally, Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and the influence of social constructivist ideas on service learning should be considered [10]. The research data obtained requires interpretation, which can only be done within the framework of a particular theory.

Critical to service learning is the idea that practical experience forms the basis for learning, and socially useful activities are used as the experiential basis for such learning. However, experience alone does not guarantee learning. Experience becomes a part of the personality through a specific procedure of comprehension and reflection.To properly understand service learning, it is necessary to accept that knowledge is socially conditioned and that experience is the basis of development, provided it is reflexively appropriated.

Scoping review

To achieve the research objective, the author chose the Scoping Review methodology. This type of review was first introduced by Hillary Arksey and Lisa O'Malley in 2005 [11]. Scoping reviews aim to identify key concepts, theories, sources of evidence, and research gaps. This methodology is typically used when the volume of literature is complex and heterogeneous [12]. In this case, researchers can use reviews to guide their research planning, and reviewers can evaluate research programmes based on the reviews when deciding on grant awards. However, the formation of service-learning research in Russia is a specific situation where publications are not highly complex. Nonetheless, the author was able to obtain the necessary results for this study by using the methodology of field review.

The methodology's advantage lies in the reproducibility of research results, a crucial feature of scientific research. Despite the ongoing debate surrounding the crisis of reproducibility in the social sciences [13], most scholars still adhere to the principle of evidence.

While some authors note the absence of agreement on how to conduct a review of a subject field and consistency in the use of terminology [14], several recent publications have proposed a coherent methodology. The author followed a revised guideline for conducting scoping reviews [12], which is consistent with the PRISMA-ScR standard [15]. It is important to acknowledge the Russian authors who promptly translated PRISMA-ScR into Russian [16].

Search and selection strategy

The literature search was conducted in scientific publication databases, including the Scientific Electronic Library (elibrary.ru), Cyberleninka (cyberleninka.ru), and Google Scholar (scholar.google.ru). The search was not limited to a specific time frame, as there have been no previous review studies on service learning in Russian. For the same reason, the author did not limit this search to publications on higher education, but included all levels of education.

The search criteria required that sources contain the terms 'обучение служением', 'Service-Learning', or 'Service Learning' in the title or keywords of the publication. The published material should be devoted to Service Learning in Russia.

A total of 209 publications were found on the elibrary.ru platform. Of these, 162 were excluded from the review as they were devoted to service learning abroad and therefore not relevant to the topic of service learning in Russia. On direct examination of the remaining 47 publications, 6 were excluded due to inconsistency with the topic. A further 4 articles were included in the study through a search in CyberLeninck, Google Scholar, and the reference lists of the selected publications. Therefore, 45 publications were chosen for further analysis.

A thorough examination of the selected materials revealed that they are descriptive rather than research-based. Typically, these publications do not claim scientific novelty and are later incorporated by the authors into more detailed

articles in peer-reviewed journals. Publishing in anthologies is a quick way to share reflections, findings, and experiences without the need for lengthy editorial work, including peer review. Therefore, only 21 articles published in scientific journals were shortlisted.

Research results
Publication activity

The first academic publication mentioning the implementation of the service-learning approach in Russia dates back to 2011 [17]. The author briefly describes his experience of internships in US schools, familiarisation with the methodology and social projects as part of his own pedagogical practice in Russian conditions. Until 2020, one or two articles were published per year. In 2020, three papers were published, but the majority came in 2023, with the publication of 11 papers. This increase is likely due to the instruction of the President of the Russian Federation[1] and the implementation of the concept of 'service learning' in Russian universities. In the following, the authors' use of concepts in different years will be discussed, focusing on the issue of conceptualisation.

It is worth noting that publications in the genre of teaching and methodological manuals should be considered separately, as they are not research-based and may not always reflect the implementation of service learning in Russia. However, readers of this journal will be interested in the most comprehensive list to date of publications that attempt to systematically disclose the approach to service learning in terms of its implementation in practice [1; 18-23].

Thematic reconstruction

To achieve the research goal and answer the research questions, the author conducted a thematic reconstruction of the subject field. The author identified the most significant topics to understand the direction of domestic research and the covered topics. As a result, the author have identified several topics related to the approach, including: 1) the specifics of the approach, 2) civicism formation, 3) the use of reflective practices, 4) the use of an evidence-based approach, 5) conceptualisation, 6) the connection with social partners, and 7) the role of the teacher.

1. Specifics of the approach. It is important to maintain objectivity and avoid subjective evaluations, while ensuring clear and concise language with a logical flow of information. The service-learning approach has been discussed in the literature for many years, and while there is no single interpretation, there are some universal aspects that can be identified. Firstly, service is understood as the solution to socially significant tasks. Secondly, training should be connected with the educational programme [24].

At first glance, the term 'service learning' appears to provide insight into the approach. However, upon closer examination of the tasks being solved and their significance to various stakeholders, it becomes clear that a definitive interpretation is not immediately apparent. Regarding the connection with the educational programme, the diversity of interpretations stems from uncertainty about who should solve social tasks – a project team or an individual student. It is also unclear whether the team should include a teacher or if they have a different role. Additionally, there is ambiguity about the connection with the educational programme – should service learning be related to a specific discipline, to the future profession in general, or is it enough that it contributes to the development of soft skills that are important for the vast majority of people in the field? Finally, it is unclear who has the potential for constructive social change in the university. [25; 26] However, only two points can be recognised as fundamental to the service learning approach: addressing socially relevant issues and linking to the educational programme.

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[1] List of instructions from the State Council meeting on 29th January 2023, Pr-173GS, item 8. URL: http://kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/70421 (accessed 01.12.2023).

Now let us examine how the specifics of the approach are reflected in domestic publications. Russian authors have largely agreed on the interpretation of solving socially important tasks, with the majority of articles (*N*=17) emphasizing this requirement as the main one. However, some authors suggest carrying out activities without specifying the parties interested in the solution. This implies that the tasks have an educational nature, such as schoolchildren's work in a museum [27] or a patriotic conference of students [28]. Regarding the connection with educational programmes, there are significantly fewer publications (*N*=9) that explicitly mention this, and only three of them specify the areas of training [29–31].

2. Civicism formation. Civicism formation is a crucial outcome in service learning programmes [32]. Directly addressing the problems of specific people allows students to witness the challenges they face and view their civic responsibilities in a new way [33]. Service learning practices that concentrate on solving specific social problems promote active citizenship and hands-on participation in social change [34; 35].

The study revealed that most publications (*N*=15) consider civicism formation as a goal of service learning. However, some articles focus solely on developing professional competencies without considering civicism [36; 37]. Nevertheless, no evidence was found to support such outcomes in the Russian context. It should be noted that researchers have not yet focused on studying the impact of service learning programmes on civicism formation.

3. Use of reflective practices. The use of reflective practices is emphasized in service learning programmes as a way of learning and developing students [38]. Reflective practices foster awareness of experience, critical thinking, and professional and personal growth [39], making them a key component of service learning programmes. Reflection deepens the understanding of service to society, developing the civic responsibility and social activity of young people. Research on reflection evaluates the effectiveness of using reflective practices in different

settings and identifies the specific ways in which reflective practices contribute to students' development [40].

The 10 articles reviewed argue that reflection in service learning programmes enhances students' understanding of service to the community, develops critical thinking, learning skills, personal qualities, and civic responsibility, thereby preparing them for active participation in community life. Some materials consider reflection as a final assessment [41] or summarising [30]. However, 11 of the articles do not mention reflection at all.

Some authors mention reflection as a stage of service learning without explaining its essence [42; 43] or referring to the fact that "the synergetic effect of the service learning methodology increases" [44, p. 277] or noting that "the effect of service learning depends to a large extent on reflection on the experience received" [45, p. 30]. Only one publication [46] provided a detailed account of reflection. The author proposed the use of a reflexive journal and identified several topics for reflection within the context of service learning, including the effectiveness of activity methods, the development of project skills, the value of civic position, and the personal meaning of civic activity. Other publications did not provide any detailed information on the application of reflective practices.

4. Use of an evidence-based approach. Using an evidence-based approach, educational research [47] employs a methodological strategy to systematically analyse and measure the impact of service learning programmes on various stakeholders, including students, community groups, educators, and non-profit organisations. The main goal of an evidence-based approach is to obtain objective and reliable data on the impact of service learning programmes on educational and social outcomes, as well as to identify effective methods and practices [48].

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research are used to provide a comprehensive picture. An evidence-based approach also involves conducting longitudinal studies to provide data on the long-term impact of pro-

grammes, for example, on students after graduation. It is important to use standardised tests and instruments to measure the specific impact factors of service learning.

The present study places special emphasis on the presence of empirical data in the materials to confirm the obtained results or substantiate the presented theses.

A number of articles (N=6) have empirical data in one form or another. The assessment of professional competences is presented in three articles [31; 36; 37]. One article attempts to address the issue of student motivation and satisfaction through a questionnaire survey of 6 students and 15 high school students as beneficiaries [49]. Another article presents a focus group study on the volunteering experience of 26 individuals. However, the data presented in this article is not directly related to service learning. Finally, a third study provides data on reflection [46]. However, the description of the conditions and methodology used is inadequate, which diminishes the value of the obtained data.

5. Conceptualisation. The subject field of service learning is developed, among other things, through conceptualisation [50]. The academic community continues to form a language to describe the new social reality [51]. This primarily concerns the basic concept that denotes the approach. The process of conceptualisation varies across different countries. The author's focus is on identifying the specifics of this process in domestic conditions.

Various translations of the term exist in different languages, such as "Aprendizaje-Servicio" (Spanish), サービスラーニング (Japanese), and "Service Civique" (French). In English, it is referred to as "Community Service in Education" or "Community-Engaged Learning".

The concept has not yet been established in the Russian language. The author was interested in observing how conceptualisation occurs in the Russian-speaking academic environment.

In some early publications, the concept of "service learning" was not translated into Russian [29; 52]. However, in most materials, one can find various and sometimes very original

names such as "learning by doing" [41], "learning through volunteering" [53], "learning through community service" [17], and "service to the community" [43]. There are also simple translations such as "service learning" [54] and "service learning" [45]. In educational and methodological publications not included in the present review, other variants such as "caring learning" [18] can be found, but the prevailing translation is "service learning".

6. Social partners. The solution of socially significant tasks requires interaction with external partners, as recognised in world practice when implementing service learning programmes [55]. Universities cooperate with various external partners, including local non-profit organisations, community groups, educational institutions, state agencies, local governments, local businesses and international organisations, to achieve their goals. In this regard, it was important for the author to understand how the experience of interaction with external partners is comprehended in scientific publications.

First of all, it is necessary to say that there are no articles directly devoted to interaction with external partners in the domestic array. Some publications briefly mention the need for ministry training with partners [43; 54; 56], and provide specific examples [30]. Nothing is known about the specifics of such interaction. Among real partners the author found local community organisations [30], a museum [27] and a school [36]. At the same time, establishing relationships with socially oriented NPOs is recognised as one of the main stages of implementing service learning [30].

7. The role of the teacher. Research has identified the importance of the teacher's role in service-learning practices. Key questions include the influence of teachers on service learning outcomes [57], their role in interacting with external partners and communities of citizens [58], their motivation to participate in service learning practices, and the impact of these experiences on them [59]. This review focuses on studies that examine the challenges of implementing service learning in national contexts

[60], as well as comparative studies that investigate the impact of service learning on the experiences of students, teaching staff, and communities of citizens [61].

The role of the teacher in service learning has not yet been extensively researched by domestic scholars. No article solely focuses on this topic. However, some articles do mention a new role of the teacher [56; 62].

Therefore, the teacher's role requires special attention. The achievement of service learning goals largely depends on how teachers understand and execute their functions and what competences they possess.

Discussion and findings

Currently, there is a growing interest in various forms of experiential education, including service learning, within the global research community. Studies have been conducted on the national specifics of implementing service learning [63; 64]. However, there have been no publications on service learning in Russia as a subject area of research. Thus, this study presents the first systematic review of a new subject area in Russian educational research.

The key findings are presented below and can be divided into two parts. The first part relates to the characteristics of the existing volume of publications, while the second part provides recommendations for shaping the subject field of research in the future.

1. Service learning has been a pedagogical approach in Russian education for over a decade. According to publications, service learning appears to be primarily implemented at the higher education level, with minimal impact on the school level. It is noteworthy that the implementation of this approach was not firstly initiated by the state. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education launched a pilot project in 2023, despite some universities already actively using this practice. It is worth examining how the formation of the service learning took place during this initial stage.

2. The current volume of publications is of a descriptive and even abstract nature. It can be concluded that the initial stage of understanding the concept and its implementation in Russian conditions has been completed. Some elements of the approach were already present in Russian higher education and developed simultaneously with the emergence of service learning in Russia. These elements include the project approach, which aims to solve real problems, the youth volunteer movement, and the interaction of universities with external partners in the context of the implementation of the third mission of the university.

3. Empirical research demands improved methodology and sample coverage. Additionally, the principle of evidence requires the development and testing of specific research tools to better understand the specifics of the impact of service learning and to improve the mechanisms for its implementation.

4. Particular attention should be paid to researching the specifics of implementing service learning for different educational programmes, from social sciences and humanities to engineering and science. At the present, obtaining scientifically sound data on the impact of service learning on students of various specialities is critical.

5. The emphasis on student development should be accompanied by systematic research on other participants in service-learning practices, including communities of citizens, representatives of partner organizations, teaching staff and other university personnel.

6. Finally, further theoretical and conceptual research is needed to advance our understanding of service learning and develop a scientific conceptual framework for exploring social reality.

Future research

Research articles typically conclude with plans for future research. Here, a number of research issues are suggested. These are intended to help colleagues focus on specific issues and develop their own research. The list of issues above is certainly not intended to be exhaustive. It is proposed to focus on the impact of the

practice of service learning in Russia on different parties – students, teachers, social partners and universities themselves.

Non-profit organisations, community groups, and informal communities are among the social partners involved in service-learning practices.

Students

• How do service learning experiences affect students' values, attitudes, beliefs?

• How does the service learning experience influence students' perceptions of their professional careers? What connection do students see between their participation in service learning and their future profession?

• How does the service learning experience impact project work, teamwork, and communication skills?

• What impact does service learning have on students' academic success?

• How and through what does service learning impact student engagement in the classroom?

• How does service learning impact students' perceptions of themselves as citizens of their country?

• What factors influence service learning outcomes (student's field of study, age, volunteerism, etc.)?

• How are students motivated to participate in service learning programmes?

• Does service learning encourage prosocial attitudes and behaviours?

• What is the long-term impact of service learning on students?

Teachers

• What impact has participation in the service learning programme had on the teachers? How do teachers perceive the experience?

• What is the motivation of teachers to participate in service learning programmes?

• How do teachers understand their role in service learning programmes?

• What strategies do faculty use during the implementation of the service learning programme? What results and under what specific conditions does the use of these strategies lead to?

• What techniques do faculty members use to conduct reflection? What factors determine the success of reflective practice?

• How is the academic culture of the faculty as a whole changing? Who or what is at the centre of their attention? How do faculty members formulate goals for their activities?

• Are there differences in perceptions of the experience of engaging in service learning among faculty of different ages or academic areas?

Social partners

• How do social partners perceive service learning and what do they know about this approach?

• What are the expectations of the social partners to participate in service learning programmes?

• To what extent do partner organisations share the goals of service learning programmes?

• What impact has the implementation of the service learning programme had on the social partners? What are the results of this impact? How can we assess the impact of service learning practices on social partners?

• What are the partnerships between the university and external organisations and informal communities?

• How and at what expense are partnerships between the university and informal communities, community groups, non-profit organisations developed?

University

• What impact does the introduction of service learning programmes have on the university as a whole? Is the understanding of the university's mission changing?

• How is the infrastructure of the university being transformed? What tools, institutional mechanisms have been created at the university to improve service learning programmes?

• What role does the university play in partnerships with external organisations and informal communities?

• What support does the university provide to students and teaching staff?

• What motivational strategies do universities use and are they aligned with the motivations of students and teaching staff?

• What indicators allow to assess the involvement of the university in the implementation of service learning programmes?

Limitations of the research

The present research, like many others, has limitations. The author did not include publications that are only partially related to the topic of service learning, such as studies on social projects in project-based learning in higher education institutions, or publications on the topic of volunteerism outside of educational programmes. Furthermore, due to space constraints, the author has not provided any methodological suggestions for the practical application of service learning. Therefore, further research on best practices beyond Russian-language scholarship is required.

Conclusion

The development of scientific knowledge requires periodic evaluation of progress, including both achievements and shortcomings. This allows for the progression of science and improvement of corresponding practices. In the case of service learning in Russia, we are currently in the initial stage. The spontaneous implementation of this practice has led to an unsystematic understanding of this phenomenon in academic publications. To develop this subject field, it was necessary to identify and analyse existing publications and propose further steps based on the findings.

The research conducted summarised an intermediate result in the study of service learning. It was established that this pedagogical approach is actively used in Russian universities, but scientific research is still in its early stages. Thematic reconstruction and full-text analysis allowed us to identify gaps, draw conclusions, and propose research questions for future work.

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