

Benefits of Exposing Third-year English Language Student Teachers to Service Learning in One Rural-based University

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Abstract

The study explored the benefits of exposing third-year Bachelor of Education students to Service Learning at a rural-based South African University. Service Learning (SL) is a practice that links community service with learning activities to promote substantive learning. This study aimed to explore whether third-year student teachers could benefit from helping first-year student university students acquire literacy skills through SL. The study was underpinned by the Experiential learning theory (ELT). A qualitative research paradigm underpinned by an interpretative epistemology was used in this study. A non-random sampling technique was used to select participants from the Faculty of Education at the participating institution. Data were generated using observing classroom activities, semi-structured and focus group interviews. Data analysis emerged with themes and sub-themes. Overall, the results revealed that the third-year students gained self-confidence, enhanced self-esteem and enhanced academic skills. The study revealed that exposing students to SL made them gain academic knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence as they endeavoured to put theoretical knowledge into practice. As a pedagogy, SL created an enabling environment for learners to express themselves freely – thereby creating space for the expression and consolidation of new experiences. Thus, the study suggested that SL be incorporated into pre-service teacher education programmes from the first year in a spiral curriculum modality up to the fourth (last) year of study. Incorporation of SL into teacher education programmes may be done by infusing it into School experience modules as proposed by the participants.

Keywords: service-learning, benefits, pre-service teachers

1. Introduction

Higher education (HE) continues to be interested in service learning (SL) (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020). SL has its roots in experiential learning (EL) and combines learning activities with community service to promote substantive learning (Furco & Norvell, 2019). Furthermore, built into the SL approach is the principle of integrating learning objectives with community service, such that students gain the experience of engaging with communities whilst at university. By so doing, it is envisaged that this engagement will provide students with an invaluable pragmatic and progressive learning experience.

The invention of the phrase “service-learning” came in 1967 and was regarded as a crucial first step in creating conceptual clarity for connecting SL to the goals and guiding principles of HE (Anderson, Boyd, Ariemma Marin & McNamara, 2019). By fusing service and learning, the phrase shifted its emphasis to the principles of good practice and helped create a widely accepted meaning.

According to Furco, & Norvell (2019), there are two main definitions of SL, firstly, SL as a type of education driven by educational innovation and secondly, SL as a philosophy ingrained in the theoretical underpinnings of the application of EL. Additionally, SL is a definite form of EL that implies community service as a fundamental part of the educational experience. While both practices (SL and EL) share the fundamental principles of learning through experience, SL has a clear focus on community engagement and social responsibility. On the other hand, EL focuses on the extensive concept that incorporates a wide range of hands-on experiences beyond community service (Mtawa, Fongwa & Wilson-Strydom, 2021).

Arellano and Jones (2018) contend that SL pedagogy promotes instruction with a clear aim and purpose that goes beyond knowledge sharing by entrenching fundamental principles and philosophies that are lacking in each subject. Accordingly, SL helps to establish a thorough understanding of the foundational principles of the subject. Therefore, SL pedagogy can be used to explore the extent to which it can help to unearth learners' shortcomings in reading and enhance their reading skills. As a result, SL can assist students in learning lecture material by providing them with real-world experiences that deepen their understanding in the promotion of critical thinking and a sense of responsibility for their education (Gardner, 2021). Hence, Hou (2022) posits that SL allows students to apply theoretical concepts from lectures to real-world experiences. Engaging in hands-on experiences allows students to see the practical implications of what they are learning in the classroom.

SL has generally grown popular in teacher preparation programs, as it gives student teachers the chance to interact with people who have varied life experiences from their own. Resch and Schrittester (2023) concur that Service Learning can be a treasured component of teacher preparation programs as it offers students a chance to connect theory with practice by engaging with varied communities. Significantly, Kieran and Anderson (2019) emphasize that service learning develops students' skills and attitudes which are necessary for effective and culturally responsive teaching.

2. Background of the Study

Experiential learning is well-practised and organised in European and American universities as it is viewed as an approach that converts theory into practice (Bringle, Hatcher & Hahn, 2016). The theory behind it constitutes the abstract concepts that the student teacher receives in the classroom become tangible and understandable through practical experience in the community it. However, at the university understudy, the element of community experience is not yet an integral part of the pre-service teacher curriculum. The Faculty of Education is still considering the matter. So, this study is timely as the Faculty is still looking for the best practice, or model, for SL suitable for the context of a rural university. The thinking is that the curriculum will have an SL module at the first-year level, aligned with the University's work-integrated learning (WIL) programme.

Student teachers at the participating university are exposed to 20 weeks of experiential learning through WIL that is spread over four years of their study. They practice at neighbouring schools, where they practice the art of teaching as a means of incorporating theory learnt in class into practice. During this period students are encouraged to identify projects around the community, which they will pursue until their fourth year of study after which they graduate. The distinction between teaching practice and the envisaged SL is that teaching practice is part and parcel of the curriculum of the student teachers. Whereas SL is an alternate pathway which offers meaningful contexts for learning and has the potential to take students beyond the classroom content and prepare them for future endeavours in later years these (SL and WIL) practices can go hand in hand. Hence, in this study, student teachers were exposed to SL in administering reading activities to first-year university students. This activity allowed third-year students to have a practical experience of carrying out a service. SL offered a real-world context and developed students' professional capabilities. In the context of an experiential learning pathway within education programmes, SL served to enrich pre-service teachers' learning potentialities. Thus, this study recommends that each student must exit university having done experiential learning so that each student can acquire real-life skills, values, and attitudes, whilst still a student, in preparation for the outside world, and be able to fit in the world of work. The experiences gained during SL could be used during WIL, as well as in the communities where students come from.

Therefore, the study's objective was to explore the benefits of exposing third-year English language student teachers to Service Learning in one rural-based university.

3. Theoretical Framework

The lenses of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) as proposed by Kolb and Kolb (2017) were adopted as a framework for this study. ELT is a widely recognised and influential framework for understanding how individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes through their experiences. Kolb and Kolb (2017) postulate that learning is most effective when it is an active, reflective, and iterative process involving concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Consequently, Kolb (1984) proposes four stages that may be used in a students' learning cycle (see the diagram below):

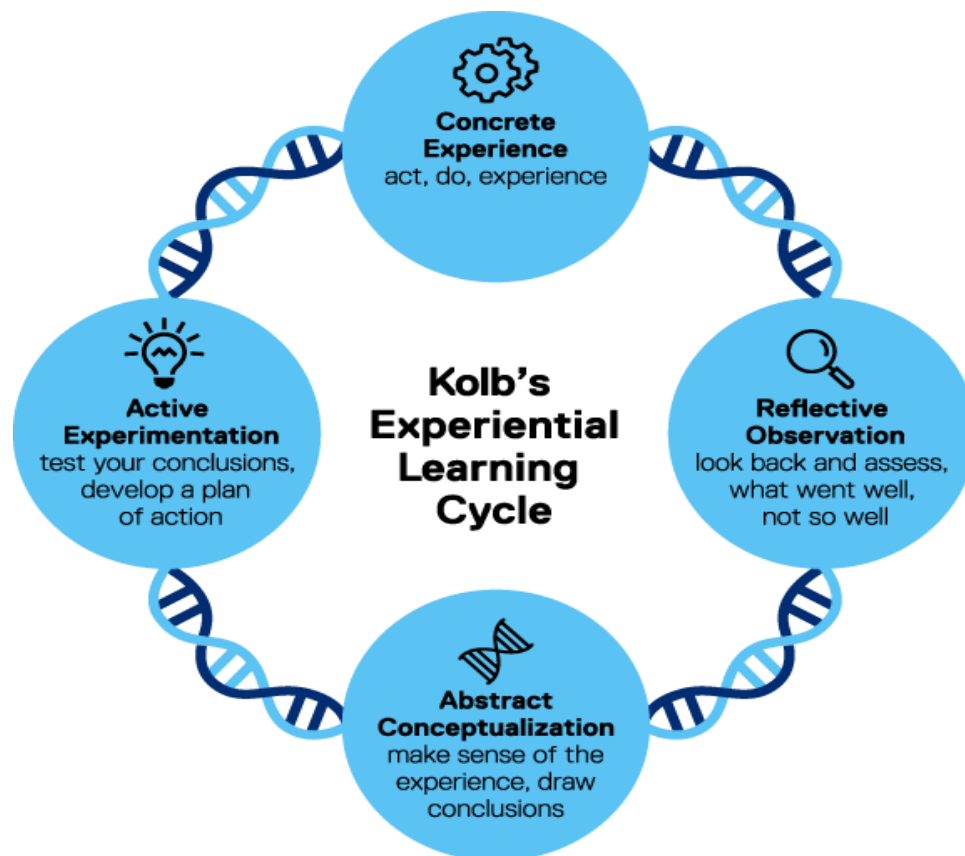


Figure 1. The Cycle of Experiential Learning and Basic Learning Styles (Kolb, 1984)

Concrete experience: At this stage of the learning cycle students are expected to encounter new experiences. The experiences encountered may be good for new activities allocated to finding new footage for real-life situations.

Reflection observation: This stage allows students to reflect on their experiences that have been acquired from the first stage of experiential learning. Reflective activities considered include excitement, conditions, and expectations around learning experiences.

Abstract conceptualisation: The assumption after reflection is that students can locate deep comprehension and attach their learning experiences to current knowledge. Additionally, students may be in the position of putting into application different theories and models to display their understanding of the real world.

Active experimentation: At this stage, students should apply their newly formed ideas or concepts in practical situations. Students also are expected to test their ideas, and put their knowledge into action., Active experimentation is more significant to gain further experience through the ELT process.

Therefore, using ELT as a theoretical framework for a study of exploring the benefits of exposing third-year English language student-teachers to Service Learning in one rural-based university can provide a solid foundation for understanding and analysing the potential advantages of incorporating service learning into the education of future English language teachers.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Approach and Design

The present study adopted a qualitative research approach through a case study design. According to Heale and Twycross (2018), case studies are in-depth investigations into a specific, and relatively small, area of interest, which may be carried out on one individual, several individuals, or one group of individuals. In this regard, a case study should resonate with the researchers' experiences as they are tangible and illuminative – and relate to the readers' knowledge, experiences, and understandings in comparing the case to their own life experiences (Mills & Gay, 2016). The study was also based on interpretivist epistemology, which acknowledges the possibility of various realities and emphasises the value of viewing a scenario through the participants' eyes (Pham, 2018). The interpretivist paradigm

was appropriate as it assumes that those involved in the research process are the ones who interpret knowledge, as they attempt to understand beliefs from the point of view of those who believe in them.

4.2 Targeted Population and Sampling Strategy

The participants of the study who were first- and third-year student-teachers were recruited using a convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling is a type of non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included in the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The target population for this study comprised students in the Faculty of Education enrolled for an English Teaching Methods module. Students enrolled at the participating university are typically drawn from diverse communities – urban, peri-urban, and rural. The research sample comprised six (6) third year students and twenty-four (24) first year students from the Intermediate Phase of the Bachelor of Education programme. Data was generated using direct observation, semi-structured and focus group interviews.

4.3 Data Generation Strategies

4.3.1 Direct Observation

Making direct observations of events as they occur is one way to collect primary data. It is a pre-planned research approach which is carried out purposefully to respond to specific research questions and objectives (Swain & King, 2022). It is a systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it unfolds. According to Maree (2016), observation is a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, without necessarily questioning or interacting with them. Likewise, Kumar (2014) explains that observation is one way to collect primary data in a purposeful, systematic, and selective way, by watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it unfolds. In the process, what is important is to observe the nuances as participants engage in an activity – thereby allowing the researchers to, inter alia, gain an insider perspective of the group dynamics (Maree, 2016).

Thus, in this study, the researchers generated data by observing the atmosphere in the classroom as well as classroom interactions between first and third-year student teachers as they engaged during reading sessions. During the class sessions, the researchers adopted the posture of a non-participant observer, mainly watching and recording classroom activities without any involvement in the ongoing SL reading activities. The observation process was helpful as it equipped the researchers with follow-up questions to be asked during interviews.

4.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Efficaciously, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the third-year student teachers to assist the researchers in understanding what they regarded to be the benefits of giving service to a fellow student. Brown and Danaher (2019) define semi-structured interviews as verbal exchanges during which the interviewee and interviewer attempt to elicit information from one another. It was envisaged that this would help the researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of how the students felt assisting fellow students to acquire reading comprehension skills. When presenting and discussing findings in the next section, the facilitators (third student teachers) are given pseudonyms to conform to the requirements of anonymity and confidentiality. The pseudonyms assigned to the facilitators were: Francis, Mwanga, Nkanyezi, Themba, Tom and Thingo.

4.3.3 Focus Group Interviews

Subsequently, the focus group interviews were carried out after all the reading sessions had been completed. They were held over three weeks – one week per group to ensure that if there were follow-up and clarity-seeking questions, these were attended to before the transcriptions were finalised. The group of twenty-four (24) first-year student teachers were divided into three groups of eight (8). The focus group interview participants were anonymously labelled as Student-Learning Focus Group (SLFG) in the study, and since there were three (3) groups, these were identified as SLFG1, SLFG2, and SLFG3, respectively. Throughout the data generation process, sensitivity was exercised concerning ethical issues in gathering information in face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and notes were also taken. According to Kumar (2014), the use of focus group interviews is another strategy used in interpretative research through which attitudes, opinions, and/or perceptions towards issues, services, or programmes are explored through open discussions among members of a group and the researchers.

5. Data Analysis and Presentation

Since the study was underpinned by the interpretivist ideology, it was assumed that there would be multiple realities emerging from the data. Interpretive researchers aim to find solutions to specific problems by utilising interpretative

research methods. The data collected from semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and direct observations were coded and analysed through several steps – beginning soon after classroom activities had been completed. The focus of the analysis was to search for meaning, accompanied by identifying any emergent units of meaning in the data. Subsequently, themes were constructed; categories and subcategories of descriptions that best represented the meanings that emerged from the data were created. As Vollstedt and Rezat (2019) observe, subcategories specify a category by denoting information such as when, where, why, and how a phenomenon is likely to occur. Subcategories, like categories, also have properties and dimensions.

In this study, data transcription evolved from a digital recording taken during interviews, and subsequently transcribed from audio-recorded information and converted into a textual format that easily facilitated analysis. Data collected from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis and data collected during observations were analysed by checking for patterns that might impact student learning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, the researchers also looked at specific characteristics of students during observations. Thus, the researchers analysed the generated data using the following steps:

Table 1. Steps that were followed in the data analysis

Steps	
Step 1. Organising and preparing	This involved transcribing interviews, typing up notes, and sorting and arranging data into different types, depending on the source of data.
Step 2. Read through all transcribed information/ data	This involved obtaining a general sense of the information, reflecting on its overall meaning, and writing notes on the margins.
Step 3. Coding the data	Coding is the starting point for most qualitative research data analysis. It involves listing all the topics, putting similar topics together by forming topics into columns, and deciding whether to group them as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
Step 4. Reviewing themes	A deeper review of identified themes follows where the researchers questioned whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes – to ensure that data within the themes cohered together meaningfully and that there was a clear distinction between them.
Step 5. Defining and naming themes	This step involved refining and defining the themes and potential subthemes within the data. An ongoing analysis was required to further enhance the identified themes. The researchers provided theme names and clear working definitions that captured the essence of each theme.
Step 6. Producing the report	Finally, the researchers transformed their analysis into an interpretable piece of writing using vivid and relevant extract examples that related to the themes, research questions, and literature – thereby ensuring that the results of the analysis were communicated accurately and convincingly.

6. Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in compliance with the university's policy on research ethics. Approval to conduct research was sought from the university's ethics committee. After getting informed consent, the third- and first-year student teachers were asked to participate in the study. The purpose, process and possible outcomes of the project were explained to students before informed consent was obtained. They were all assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The same assurances were given at the beginning of each data generation session. Furthermore, no personal information was made available to any third parties. In addition, no comments made during the interviews were attributable to any individual by name. Moreover, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from participation, should they have wished to do so at any stage of the research. Since data generation, the tape recorder and materials used to collect data have been kept safe to protect participants' identities and to check consistency when required.

7. Discussion and Presentation Findings

In this section, the researchers present the results from the data generation phase, directed towards the one research objective upon which this study was framed. The presentation is based on one theme and five sub-themes that emerged from the data. These sub-themes were used to consolidate responses from participants and align them to the

research objective of the study – thereby enabling the reaching of informed inferences and conclusions. Most significantly, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants and ensure the confidentiality of the gathered information. In the next sub-sections, the responses are categorised and presented according to sub-themes. Subsequently, from the interviews with the senior students as facilitators, the following theme and sub-themes emerged:

Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Benefits of exposing third-year English language student teachers to Service Learning.	a) Experience builds confidence and self-esteem.
	b) Communication and the expression of thoughts or ideas.
	c) Advanced reading skills.
	d) Enhanced listening skills.
	e) Improved presentation skills.

7.1 Benefits of Exposing Third-year English Language Student Teachers to Service Learning

7.1.1 Experience Builds Confidence and Self-esteem

It was evident from the participant's responses that, the experience they had of implementing a Reading programme for first-year students came with many benefits and rewarding experiences for them as third-year student teachers. The student engagement demonstrated that the more the first-year students asked questions the more, they became confident in their ability to answer questions correctly. Sevin, Hale, Brown and McCauley (2016) attest that exposure to real-life activities/situations assists in developing communication skills, building teamwork and awareness of the workplace as participants develop a higher sense of responsibility while carrying out their duties. Similarly, Rutti, LaBonte, Helms, Hervani and Sarkarat (2016) aver that assigning service duties to students assists them in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of real-world issues and attain opportunities to apply classroom theory and knowledge, as they engage in structured reflection of their experiences. In this study, it became apparent that the students gained self-confidence and propelled self-esteem apart from enhanced academic skills.

Indeed, from direct observations, the level and quality of expressions changed from when the third-year student teachers introduced the programme to the time when they got to the end of it. Quite evidently, the students gained confidence in themselves, not in an empowering manner but by respecting their 'learners' as they went about explaining certain concepts in the programme. There appeared to be a marked positive development in their professional skills, including the development of service perspectives and reflective skills. These outcomes are reflected in the various responses advanced by the student teachers:

Thingo: Naturally, I am a shy person – but this opportunity gave me the confidence to stand in front of students and ask questions and follow-ups. My self-esteem has increased. The SL pedagogy broke boundaries for me and I can confess that my shyness changed to confidence.

Similarly, Francis and Mwanga had the following to say:

Francis: I was free with learners, I gained confidence, and I was able to participate in the SL Reading programme freely. It felt good and allowed me to gain a lot of information as I was explaining to the learners. My participation in the SL learning experience allowed me to understand the course concepts.

Mwanga: Students (first years) benefitted because they were able to participate by asking and answering questions. In the process, they benefitted by gaining reading skills and understanding concepts that apply to reading. There was interaction and sharing of ideas which convinced me that learners benefitted from the SL tool.

The above observations by the third-year students were supported by the first-year students who professed as follows:

SLFG1: Socialising with the 3rd year-level students in the form of learning in the lecture hall was the best thing as a first-year student since I have never contacted the lecturers. It has been a good experience for me to learn through SL. I have acquired knowledge that is needed. I see myself as a primary beneficiary and I can cascade this knowledge to the community.

SLFG2: I have benefitted a lot from the SL activity because I never paid attention to the way I read, whether I am slow or fast but today I have identified my problem. I would need to skim and scan, that would help me a lot and would make it easier to comprehend the comprehension when reading.

In general, the first-year student teachers as participants stated that their experiences in the SL programme were eye-opening as they were able to identify their weaknesses. Furthermore, their shyness was short-lived as the interaction between the facilitators (first-year student teachers) and the learners (the first-year student teachers) was evident as the activity progressed. The learning in the activity was well aligned with the argument by Mainde, Chola and Mpolomoka (2021) that SL is an innovative pedagogy that enhances practical classroom practice skills, as well as opening avenues to civic engagement. Students can learn by discovering themselves or they can learn by discovering certain skills that they were previously not aware of.

The sub-themes that fell under the theme of building confidence and self-esteem were as follows:

7.1.2 Communication and Expression of Thoughts and Ideas

The findings revealed that throughout the programme, students expressed the view that their communication, listening, reading and presentation skills were enhanced. The researchers observed the changing of personalities progressively as students gained confidence by speaking with conviction and boldness. Osman and Peterson (2013) affirm that an integral part of SL is that students learn through and from experience. Both groups of students were able to communicate in ways that easily conveyed their thoughts and ideas. This indicated that the students were exposed to meaningful experiences that enabled them to become more creative and plan their activities according to how they wanted them to progress. These observations agree with Widjajanti (2019) that an understanding of language, as an effective medium, is when one can easily express his or her ideas and thoughts in that language. Through their preparations, the students were able to express themselves and brought new ideas to the learning environment. Indeed, when students can structure their learning experiences, they tend to experience long-lasting benefits (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020). In this study, the students were exposed to practical learning activities which allowed them to have an enduring, exciting, and unforgettable experience. The students gave their evidence as follows:

Mwanga: The experience was pretty exciting, and it lifted me and my self-esteem. It built up my presentation skills and allowed me to explore new things while standing in front of my peers. From campus to communities will be a big break for me to render a service that builds confidence in learners. The foundation of everything begins with teaching and inculcating a skill of reading will create life-long learners.

Francis: I benefited from the experience of presenting the SL programme. I was able to understand concepts and strategies of reading better, whenever I went to do my presentations. The experience challenged me to read and prepare thoroughly for my presentations. Having to teach peers was pleasing.

Nkanyezi: The experience made me to be free with learners. I was able to interact and that gave me confidence to teach them. I gained a lot of information by teaching level 1. I got an opportunity to understand the concepts better than I did when I was doing level 1.

Indeed, the first-year students complemented these observations in the following ways:

SLFG1: Seeing other students share information with us, gave me a valuable experience, and I feel confident that when the opportunity avails itself, I can also be able to share information with other students.

SLFG3: The experience showed me that helping other people in need makes up better people. For us as level 1, learning through Moodle is difficult, so the level 3 students' lecture helped a lot. The SL pedagogy has taught me the importance of caring for the communities.

It was evident from the participant's responses that, the experiences they had of implementing the Reading programme carried notable benefits to them as student teachers. Apart from academic skills that were enhanced they also gained self-confidence and self-esteem – as well as an enhanced ability to learn with increased interest in civic engagement (Furco, 2011).

7.1.3 Advanced Reading Skills

The findings revealed that it was gratifying to see that by the end of the programme, student teachers of both groups demonstrated a high level of reading skills. Reading is a very important academic skill. For the third-year students, this was accompanied by a high level of preparation, which became evident during their presentations. It was clear to the researchers while observing lessons, that they had read thoroughly and understood the concepts and instructional

strategies required for successful implementation. They were able to unpack, explain, give examples, and create learning scenarios. Indeed, sufficient, and proper reading had been done before the lessons were presented.

Furthermore, it was pleasing to see the third-year teachers incorporate different teaching strategies in their presentations. They were not shy to pass the baton to the next student when they felt unsure how to respond to questions posed by their learners. As the third-year student teachers engaged in ‘hands-on’ experiential learning, this required them to explain abstract concepts behind concrete experiences – thereby transforming their learning from abstract to concrete (Kolb & Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 2018). This was one way the student teachers demonstrated confidence in themselves that they had, indeed, read and understood the concepts thoroughly before they presented their lessons. The verbatim quotations below give support to this assertion:

Themba: The experience of using SL as a pedagogy allowed me to impart knowledge and engage with students, though it was a two-way process. Some people need things to be explained further for them to understand. You need to make a foundation relating to what they know before giving them something complex.

Mwanga: This experience gave me an opportunity to read, and I acquired new knowledge and perspectives on what other people are thinking. They respond differently because they understand things differently, so reading thoroughly in preparation for my lessons allowed me to respond appropriately to their questions.

These observations by the third-year student teachers are complemented by corresponding views of their learners – the first-year student teachers:

SLFG2: My experience in participating in the SL reading activity had some highlights about SL as a pedagogy. SL as a concept is a good strategy that enhances students’ learning, “mina ingisizile” (it helped me) as a first-year student in the university. In the future, I will be active in school as a tutor to the first-year students who will come after me.

SLFG3: I have benefitted a lot from the experience of participating in this class. I have never paid attention to the way I read, but with this reading programme, I have identified where my problem lies. I never knew my reading skills, when I read, I would get lost and lose interest. Going forward I will apply the reading strategy I have acquired.

The above responses show that the senior participants had done proper advanced reading before the lessons were administered to level one students. The experiences were motivational for both groups. In particular, the first-year students expressed a wish to be given a similar opportunity to assist those coming after them. This was an important outcome of this SL programme.

7.1.4 Enhanced Listening Skills

The findings revealed that the skill of listening allowed both groups of student teachers to learn to contextualise and consolidate information about phenomena as they unfolded. In addition, the participants were given opportunities to reflect and respond as required. Listening was mentioned as a skill that has been enhanced during class presentations of SL by both groups of student teachers. The SL pedagogy put them under the spotlight whenever they were expected to listen so that they could respond to some questions.

Overall, listening allows one to explore individual thoughts and feelings. Listening is one general educational skill that is enhanced by the SL pedagogy, and it allows the student to perform better in the classroom. This boosts students’ levels of confidence. Listening and being listened to create magical experiential learning that relies on the exclusive association/relationship that is formed between the pre-service teacher (third-year student teacher), the pre-service learner (first-year student teacher), and the SL activity as it unfolded (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Smith-Tolken and Bitzer (2017) aver that this kind of engagement is reciprocal and scholarly; SL is where both parties learn from each other. The experiential approach places the substance (SL activity) to be learned in the centre to be experienced by both the facilitator and the learner. The verbatim quotations below reflect this perspective:

Tom: The experience benefitted me in my weakness of not listening. From week one to week two it changed completely; before the presentation, you need to research more, and you learn to listen to others to respond. As my weakness, I wouldn’t say I am shy, but eye contact was something I was weak at, asking learners questions forced me to keep eye contact and listen to their responses.

SLFG1: My participation in this activity is exciting and the class is effective. The mystery of reading is uncovered. I didn’t know that reading has phases that I needed to apply when reading. I am going to master these strategies and implement them during my reading time.

These quotations show that participants had their listening skills enhanced by engaging with the learners through the Reading programme. Questions posed by the first-year student teachers created an engagement with the third-year student teachers which made them appreciate the build-up of confidence and to keep eye contact. Therefore, one

would be justified to say that the SL pedagogy had influenced the attitudes of the students from non-comital to commitment by listening attentively – particularly to respond appropriately. This is one value towards civic engagement (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020).

7.1.5 Improved Presentation Skill

The findings revealed that Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) posits that knowledge is created through transformation of experience and that experiential learning is important in the acquisition of skills – such as communication, presentation, and writing. Accordingly, Olagoke-oladokun, et al. (2020) observe that, as an experiential approach, SL is gradually being positioned in Nigerian higher education for the effective development of students as well as preparing them to handle next-generation challenges. The third-year student teachers reported that the experience of administering the SL Reading programme to level 1 students enhanced their presentation and communicative skills. The communication skills learned in this way may also extend to other audiences, such as communicating information in objective ways with communities, peers, and teachers (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). The following verbatim quotations give credence to this claim:

Nkanyezi: The experience of rendering the SL programme made things easier for me, to have a conversation with learners through the presentation of my slides. This led to a two-way communication between me and the learners. We were both presenting to each other, but in different ways: I was presenting the SL Reading lessons and the learners were asking questions, responding, and sharing ideas.

Themba: The experience made me feel free as I was doing my presentation. I felt confident, I was able to participate and feel good. I gained a lot of information as we exchanged ideas.

SLFG2: Participating in the SL activity was such a blessing. I realised the important role played by the three reading phases to which we were introduced. I was previously not aware that there was a phase called the ‘before reading phase’. When I read, I would get confused and distracted. Now I have learnt all these reading phases.

This shows that, as the participants were presenting the Reading programme, other skills such as communication and writing were enhanced. This indicates that, as a pedagogy, SL has a ripple effect on the development of participants through its methods of engagement (Ellerton, Di Meo, Pantaleo, Kemmerer, Bandziukas, & Bradley, 2015). Indeed, in this case, the SL pedagogy brought life to the classroom.

8. Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by its scope and design. This was the case study. The case study design has the drawback that the researchers’ personal opinions and biases, and the way the researchers gathered data may have affected the outcomes and veracity of the study. Information concerning prior experiences and occurrences may have been notoriously susceptible to misunderstanding due to distortion and dependence on recollection when reconstructing the case history. Additionally, the lack of scientific generalisability is one of the main issues and most prominent criticisms of case studies. It is not usually possible to replicate findings from case studies, and there may be serious problems in generalising the results of a unique individual to other people because the findings may not be representative of any population.

9. Implications and Suggestions

This study aimed to investigate the benefits of SL for student teachers. Based on the findings of this study, the following implications and recommendations may be considered to expose all students to the opportunities that come with SL:

- (1) The faculty of education at the participating university needs to critically review its preservice teacher education curriculum to restructure its WIL programme to integrate an SL component(s) to allow students to gain valuable work-related and real-world experiences. Such skills would include community-based project design and implementation, as well as developing competencies in independent lifelong knowledge production and discovery, instead of waiting to be spoon-fed.
- (2) Stakeholders within and outside the university need to have a dialogue so that SL as an innovative approach to teaching, learning, research, and community engagement, which are the core business and aspirations of university education, can be considered for the benefit of the students.
- (3) The need to have SL infused into the school experience module was an important proposal which came from the participants. They pointed out that this would be the most appropriate place in the curriculum to accommodate SL. Accordingly, it is recommended that this proposal be explored to determine the feasibility of doing so.

(4) It is recommended that third-year student teachers be involved in SL reading projects for the surrounding schools, in preparation for the learners' readiness when they start their university studies – thereby bridging the gap in language communication.

(5) SL be incorporated into preservice teacher education programmes from the first year in a spiral curriculum modality up to the fourth (last) year of study.

(6) There should be advocacy to promote the value and benefits of SL among academic staff (the lecturers) because without their full conviction and belief in its value and benefits, both as a worthy undertaking on its own intrinsic merits and as something that has academic value for their professional development, they will not find the will and energy to implement it. This could include profiling SL widely on university campuses, as an innovative pedagogy that entrenches valuable skills, values, and research to students and lecturers, thereby transforming communities and societies.

(7) The resourcing of SL was another point that came from the participants. It was strongly felt that in embracing SL, authorities at the various levels of institutional management need to allocate requisite resources for the implementation of SL.

10. Conclusion

This study concludes that students can embrace SL as an innovative pedagogy, which allows students to be free and at liberty to plan and structure their learning in a space created by them. Brainstorming ideas amongst the third-year student teachers can be the key to the success of the students. Additionally, this study concludes that SL as a pedagogy was beneficial to student teachers, on both sides, i.e. those discharging it and the target recipients. Therefore, both groups of students need to be given the requisite resources and opportunities to participate in SL activities to reach their full potential, is. Therefore, the university may actively engage the local community by forming partnerships, so that students can have a platform for experiential learning. This can be achieved by designing appropriate SL programmes and projects with strategies for implementation. In the process, this may enable the university to fulfil its mandate of teaching, research, and community engagement by using the classrooms and lecture halls as platforms to inspire commitment from the students by allowing them to realise their potential and teach them to care about the communities from which they originate. SL is one pedagogy that embraces all the philosophical aspects of the teacher's life because teachers are equipped with extensive knowledge and skills, to tackle different challenges they come across.

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