

# Service learning in teacher education programmes: A literature review on the rationale, benefits, and challenges

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## Abstract

*Service-learning is a teaching approach that gives students opportunities to participate in a service that meets community needs as well as being relevant to the curriculum content and to reflect on the service-learning activity/activities and experience. While the discipline specific content is determined by the National Approved Curriculum for the respective Degree, Diploma or Certificate programme, activities which contribute towards concretising concepts and thus, marry theory with real-life challenges are jointly designed and agreed upon by the subject lecturer and the specific community partner. As pre-service teachers engage in service-learning activities, they experience personal and professional growth through: (i) taking leadership roles in service-learning activities; (ii) exposure to- and awareness of the real-life environment in which the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching profession has to operate; (iii) engaging in and participating in authentic real-life centred teaching practices; (iv) acquisition of new dispositions necessary for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher; and (v) exposure to- and the relevance of service-learning as a teaching/learning pedagogy. Therefore, this study is a literature review of a range of some of the existing work on service-learning and it collates and brings together key components of service-learning, its benefits, and challenges. The implications of service-learning in Teacher education programmes are that curriculum content should be questioned regarding its relevance in modern day society, how well it prepares pre-service teachers for teaching skills and needs of a rapidly changing economy and society, and that education should take place in an authentic learning environment where community service activities are integrated with the academic curriculum.*

### Key words

Community partners.  
Pre-service teachers.  
Reflection.  
Service-learning

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The first submission received: 14<sup>th</sup> May 2023

Revised submission received: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023

Accepted: 30<sup>th</sup> August 2023

## 1. Introduction

Service-learning is a teaching approach that gives students opportunities to participate in a service that meets community needs as well as being relevant to the curriculum content and to reflect on the service-learning activity/activities and experience. Reflection is a key component in service-learning as it helps students to link content, curriculum theory and practice, thus solidifying theory to practice, and thus have a deeper understanding of the course/curriculum content. Literature review on the comments given by pre-service teachers who engaged in service-learning, as well as Faculty members who implemented service-learning in teacher education programmes, shows that service-learning experiences lead to both personal and professional growth as well as preparing these students for their profession as teachers.

This research article is organised as follows: Section 2 explains the methodology used, Section 3 examines the concept of service learning bringing out its key components, i.e., reflection, relevance of service-learning activities, and the mutual beneficial nature of service-learning. Section 4 discusses the rationale for service-learning in teacher education programmes from the perspectives of pre-service teachers and Faculty member in countries like the USA, Australia, and some European countries. The perspective from pre-service teachers and Faculty members in these countries is examined and presented because the teacher education programmes in these countries have gone beyond having Teaching practice (the teaching practicum) as the sole field experience during teacher preparation. In these countries, Faculty members realise and acknowledge that identifying as well as coming face-to-face with “real life” problems affecting “real” children in “real” settings outside the classroom, and the fluid nature of such situations are relevant experiences and challenges which pre-service should be exposed to. These help to develop the pre-service teachers’ abilities to be flexible, to be critical thinkers, as well as to facilitate their personal growth and development as they learn how to deal with real life problems that have significant effects on people and not simulated problems which are/can be easily solved in a classroom setting. Therefore, such authentic experiences help reinforce understanding as well as broaden understanding because first-hand experiences are the most effective way of learning. Section 5 examines the challenges in integrating service-learning in the teacher education programmes given the preferences which some students and Faculty members may have, the demands associated with designing and implementing effective service-learning programmes, as well as the importance of maintaining long-term partnerships with Community partners. Section 6 presents the conclusion and Section 7 presents the limitations of this study.

## 2. Methodology

This study is a literature review of a range of some of the existing works on service-learning and it collates and brings together key components of service-learning, its benefits, and challenges. The review is done using Journal articles written on service-learning as a component in the teacher education programmes in some universities in Australia, the United States of America, and some European countries. Perspectives from pre-service teachers and Faculty members in Universities in these countries are examined and presented.

## 3. The concept service-learning

Dewey’s (1938) experiential learning theory has been credited with the service-learning approach to teaching/learning. Dewey’s theory advocated the idea of learning by doing, thus a relationship between knowledge and action. Therefore, it was assumed that faster and more permanent learning was more likely if education took place in an authentic learning environment, and if such learning was accompanied by sharing experiences (Capella-Peris, *et al.*, 2020; Galvan and Parker, 2011).

Service-learning is a teaching approach that gives students opportunities to participate in a service that meets community needs as well as being relevant to the curriculum content and to reflect on the service-learning activity/activities and experiences. Thus, service-learning serves as an integration of community service activities with academic skills, curriculum content, and critically reflecting on these experiences (Resch and Schrittester, 2021; Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2020); Harfitt, 2018; Hildenbrand and Schultz, 2015). As students engage in service-learning activities, they experientially learn subject matter and at the same time critically question the status quo of society and its norms and standards, the curriculum content, its relevance in modern day society, as well as how they can prepare themselves to meet the needs of a rapidly changing economy and society (Galvan and Parker, 2011).

While the discipline specific content is determined by the National Approved Curriculum for the respective Degree, Diploma or Certificate programme, the activities which contribute towards concretising concepts and thus, marry theory with practice (or real-life challenges) are jointly designed and agreed upon by the subject lecturer and the specific community partner. Bringle and Hatcher (1996:236) and Chambers and Lavery (2017:5) note that communities participate in guiding the identification of service activities by specifically stipulating the concerns to be addressed and to have a consensus that mutual needs are met between students, the lecturers, and the community partners. In this regard therefore, it can be argued that since the community partner's interest(s) is(are) to ensure that the activities are completed successfully in response to genuine community needs, they will positively and actively engage with the students and the subject lecturer. Therefore, as Furco (1996:12) notes, the intention is to "equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring."

### 3.1 Relevant service-learning activities as key requirements

Having appropriate service-learning activities is particularly important to provide meaningful learning opportunities. Resch and Schrittmesser (2021:3) note that, "all forms of service-learning should meet certain quality criteria in particular about the meaningfulness of the service and the link to the curriculum". Otherwise, as Chiva-Bartoll *et al* (2020:6) note, where there is no link between the curriculum of the course and the service provided, this would limit the benefits of the service-learning programme as the desired professional skills may not be acquired.

Therefore, a thorough curriculum review maybe inevitable so that the individual components of the curriculum (e.g., theory, applied/or practical application of theory, and any other coursework) can be carefully coordinated with service-learning activities in stable partnerships established with community organisations. Thus, with service-learning fully integrated in the academic curriculum, well-thought-out service-learning activities that focus on both community needs, and academic curriculum content can be put in place with well-structured time for effective reflection to enhance opportunities for application of skills and knowledge, as well as enabling extended learning opportunities.

Examples of service-learning activities for pre-service teachers include (i) doing lesson plans and teaching students in the afterschool program with lessons on various topics (Daniels, *et al* (2015:5); (ii) assisting students who are refugees in the afternoons and weekend mornings with school homework; as well as planning, organising and running leisure programmes (Carrington and Saggars, 2006:797); (iii) helping street children at designated centres with their reading and homework so as to improve the quality of their education; organising and establishing vegetable gardens on the school grounds to raise awareness on good nutrition (Castle and Osman, 2003:109); (iv) organising and carrying out anti-bullying campaigns so as to instil in children how to be friends, as well as to interact in friendly and caring ways; designing and implementing interactive games, storytelling and other social events with children who experience difficulties with reading, memory retention and problem solving skills (Petker and Petersen, 2014:126, 127); and (v) working in collaboration with school children, qualified teachers and community agencies to design and implement a service-learning experience; allowing pre-service teachers to create, on their own, a complete service-learning project for a unit in a course for implementation immediately or in the near future (Anderson, 2000:8, 9). Such service-learning programmes and activities can have a positive impact on pre-service teachers' content mastery/comprehension and application, personal growth, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary and needed when preparing them for the modern-day teaching profession.

### 3.2 Reflection as a key component in service-learning

Reflection is a key component in service-learning, and McKenna, *et al* (2004:75) say that the students ought "to reflect on what they are doing, on what happens, on what that means, and on its importance". This is an essential part of service-learning because this helps the students to link content, curriculum theory and practice, thus solidifying theory to practice, and thus have a deeper understanding of course/curriculum content. It has also been noted that there is empirical evidence to support the claim that only systematically designed practical experiences with elements of reflective practice led to increased professional development because a sustained relationship between theory and practice would have been established (Resch and Schrittmesser, 2021; Harfitt, 2018; Hildenbrand and Schultz, 2015; Daniels *et al*, 2015; Anderson, 2000). For more effective and critical reflection to take place, so that students can connect more easily what they are learning in the service-learning activity/activities and the curriculum content and theory, the course lecturer may organise and facilitate (i) small group discussions where students share experiences and lessons learned, (ii) structured journal writing by the students where they document their experiences and lessons learnt, (iii) directed reflection through instructor-tailored reflection activities and questions that suit the course outcomes and the progress of each student. Furthermore, students must reflect on service-learning activities throughout the course of the service-learning program, and as such, frequent reflections are crucial to maximise the lessons of service-learning experiences (Hildenbrand and Schultz, 2015; Anderson, 2000).

Various frameworks for how reflection should occur have been suggested, viz. (i) Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Reflective Practice where concrete experiences are expressed, reflected on and linked to skills, as well as learning from knowledge, the experiences and putting these into practice moving forward; (ii) Gibb's (1988) Reflective Cycle which focusses on describing the experience and feelings, evaluating the good and bad sides of the experience, analysing to make sense of the experience, conclusions and considerations for future events; (iii) Schön's (1991) Reflective Model which encourages reflection during the event (thus decide on how to act at the time and to act immediately) and reflecting after the event to see what one would do differently given the new information gained and/or theoretical perspectives studied that inform experience and help process feelings and actions; (iv) Rolfe, *et al* (2001) Reflective Model which focusses on answering key specific questions during reflection, i.e. what?, so what?, and now what?. For example, what did I learn? So, what is my new understanding of the situation? Now what do I need to do to make things better and what might be the consequences of changing something? (v) Jasper's (2013) ERA Cycle that which focusses on experience, reflection, and action, with action as the key component as it feeds the learning obtained through reflection into future experiences; and (vi) Brookfield's (2005) Four Lenses which bring to the fore that teachers should critically examine their own assumptions by viewing their practice through four distinct interconnecting lenses, viz., lens of their own autobiography as teachers and learners, lens of learners' eyes, lens of colleagues' experiences, and lens of educational literature (University of Hull LibGuides).

Each framework is based on building understanding from experiences and thus seeks to facilitate translating analysis and explanation of feelings and thoughts about an experience into concrete plans moving forward. However, models by Kolb, Gibb, and the ERA are often regarded as mainly providing a structure for a reflective essay or a learning log entry, and thus tend to lead to superficial reflection. Thus, the models by Schön (1991), Rolfe, *et al* (2001), and Brookfield (2005) are regarded as having more depth as they ensure reflection which involves critical thinking and analysis, and thus avoid superficial reflection (University of Hull LibGuides).

Through reflection, service-learning experiences have the potential to positively impact the pre-service teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the learners' different cultures where this is relevant. The pre-service teachers can begin to value and make sense of the different cultural experiences, and

assumptions their students bring to school that might be different from what they, as pre-service teachers, bring in the classroom (Hildenbrand and Schultz, 2015: 264). Reflecting on these differences and their implications for learning on the part of the children and for the pre-service teachers' own teaching skills (which Rolfe *et al.*'s Reflective Model and Brookfield's Four lenses facilitate), would make the pre-service teacher aware of the need to adapt and adjust their classroom teaching techniques/methods for the teaching/learning process to be more effective and rewarding to both the children and the pre-service teacher. For example, instead of using commercially produced teaching aids, the pre-service teacher would now use the wide variety of culturally based art and craft materials the children produce at home being assisted by their parents and bring to school. Thus, reflection would help the pre-service teacher to be creative in harnessing the children's diverse cultures to enhance her teaching skills and thus create more enriched teaching/learning experiences for the children, experiences which acknowledge and incorporate their diverse cultures. This would be in line with (i) Rolfe, *et al.*'s (2001) action-oriented "now what?" which calls for concrete and relevant action, and (ii) Brookfield's (2005) Four lenses model which argues that by questioning their own assumptions, teachers will be able to make decisions on more appropriate approaches to their teaching and purposeful responses to learners' issues.

Facilitated reflection within service-learning leads to personal growth when the pre-service teachers see the link between their individual acts of service in the community, their view of the world and their university study. This is because, as Carrington and Sagers (2007:796) note, reflection serves to "redefine an individual's life journey" as the pre-service teacher derives personal knowledge and gain new insights about themselves regarding their areas of strength and weaknesses, and thus make decisions that will influence future practice. Reflection on power dynamics and how that underpins and distorts educational practices, as raised in Brookfield's (2005) Four Lenses Model, would also lead to personal growth when the pre-service teachers see the link between some of the deficiencies in the education system and the power dynamics within the system. It can also be argued that through this reflection, the pre-service teacher would gain new knowledge of career options and how much they could do with an education degree/or diploma besides teaching.

### 3.3 The mutually beneficial nature of service-learning

Through service-learning, a pre-service teacher has opportunities to develop relationships with the community and to strengthen those relationships as they actively engage in solving real-world needs and to take time for critical reflection on each service-learning activity. Since the service-learning activities are negotiated and agreed on by both the community partner and the University Faculty, both the students and the community partner benefit. The students benefit through knowledge and skills shared with them by the community partner(s) as well as engaging in a service activity or activities that help them to link theory to practice and thus concrete curriculum concepts. The community partner(s) benefit from the skills and knowledge brought in by the students and contributing to a service that meets community needs. Thus, the mutually beneficial nature of service-learning strengthens the equality of the relationship, which is essential for more balanced service-learning and for ongoing future collaboration between the University and the community in designing service-learning projects/ activities that ensure that service is provided, and learning occurs.

Therefore, with service learning, Community partners are treated as equals in the learning experiences provided to the pre-service teachers, as the expertise in the communities is accessed and harnessed. Academic, school-based, and community-based knowledge therefore come together in a less hierarchical way to support the pre-service teachers (Harfitt, 2018).

#### 4. Rationale for service-learning in teacher education programmes

The teaching practicum (or Teaching Practice) is generally acknowledged as the field experience in teacher preparation models and its importance in shaping the pedagogies which pre-service teachers need at the beginning of their teaching careers can never be underestimated. However, as Şimsek (2019) and Harfitt (2018) note, in some countries, teacher education programs have transitioned to a service-learning approach for their experiential education component. Harfitt (2018) notes that this has been in response to calls to transform the way teachers are prepared for the globalised 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Therefore, for the pre-service teachers, the community placements for service-learning are an alternative to the traditional teaching practicum (or Teaching Practice) in school classrooms. The teacher education program has thus moved away from the usual focus on new teachers developing technical skills only, toward a programme that integrates more community-based knowledge, thus opening and making available new knowledge spaces for pre-service teachers.

The globalised 21<sup>st</sup> Century continues to experience high immigration rates, together with a high number of people from disadvantaged sociocultural environments who are at risk of social exclusion; and this creates a context in which today's teachers must operate in. Thus, pre-service teachers must be prepared for this, and this can be achieved through service-learning activities carried out in Communities and not the traditional teaching practice programme in a conventional school setting. Therefore, as Harfitt (2018:3, 4) notes, Schools and Universities cannot on their own "educate teachers well without accessing the rich and powerful knowledge and expertise that exists in the communities of which they are part". Thus, through service-learning, Community partners and the University come together as co-educators to promote an "enhanced form of situated learning for better teacher education" that develops teachers who are relevant and effective given the rapid changes in a globalised 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The rationale for service-learning in teacher education can be derived from its benefits as established through comments made by pre-service student teachers who engaged in service-learning during their teacher education programmes as well as Faculty members who incorporated service-learning in their Teacher education curriculum in countries like the USA, Australia, and some European countries. The push for including service-learning in teacher education programmes can come from the pre-service teachers themselves who feel that they are inadequately prepared and as such lack confidence due to a lack of/or limited corresponding experience. For example, Resch and Schritteser (2021:2) note that "pre-service teachers want to gain practical experience of teaching as soon as possible, and as such may become frustrated if they receive too little practical input on teaching and too much input without an applied focus." This came out from the fact that some pre-service teachers tend to feel that "the amount of practice included in teacher education is inadequate, and the theory is too distant from their practical experiences in schools."

##### 4.1 Improved content comprehension and application

The pre-service teachers come face-to-face with the practical nature and experience of concepts like inclusive education, diversity, power relations, marginalisation, segregation, injustice, refugees, underprivileged, etc., which they learn in class. Through this exposure, the service-learning programme therefore, as Carrington and Sagers (2007:800, 803) note, reinforces and concretises these concepts, thus reinforcing the students' understanding of and the meaning of these concepts which they would have simply read about at university/college. At the end of the day, with the links between theory and practice reinforced, the students will come to view and discuss these issues and concepts from a more informed perspective. Therefore, as Castle and Osman (2003:108) note, the community becomes a resource for student learning and a tool to concretise concepts with, rather than students being a resource for the community.

Service-learning also enhances content comprehension and application from what Harfitt (2018:2, 10) notes as the opportunities which service-learning affords pre-service teachers with regard to (i) playing an active role to construct knowledge in a wider context of a community compared to a structured school or classroom setting; (ii) develop a more nuanced understanding of knowledge by enhancing ability to apply concepts learnt in lectures to a community which is not a controlled environment and neatly structured as a classroom setting; (iii) learn to work in diverse and ill-defined contexts and accessing expertise from community members; and (iv) enactment of culturally-relevant practices given the dynamic nature of communities.

## **4.2 Personal and professional growth and development**

As the pre-service teachers engage in service-learning activities, they experience personal and professional growth through: (i) taking leadership roles in service-learning activities; (ii) exposure to- and awareness of the real-life environment in which the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching profession has to operate; (iii) engaging in and participating in authentic and real-life centred teaching practices; (iv) acquisition of new dispositions necessary for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher; and (v) exposure to and the relevance of service-learning as a teaching/learning pedagogy.

### **4.2.1 Personal and professional growth and development through taking leadership roles**

As the pre-service teachers engage in activities outside the university through service-learning, they have opportunities to take over some tasks and responsibilities often held by community partners, as well as getting involved in social and responsible active citizenship events. The pre-service teachers also get exposed to managing service-learning projects and thus acquire the relevant skills, as well as starting to acquire social capital and awareness of various community partners whom they can maintain contact with for the future. All this leads to gaining practical experience which has the potential to lead to personal growth and development. Daniels *et al* (2015:5) note that the ongoing responsibilities the pre-service teachers get exposed to in designing and setting learning goals, implementing and assessing learning activities, preparing and developing programmes and activities that address real life educational standards/mandates; lead to increased self-efficacy, self-esteem and confidence in the pre-service teachers, as well as to develop essential life skills like the ability to communicate more effectively with parents and increased interpersonal skills.

Daniels, *et al* (2015:6, 7) also note that due to the innovative nature of service-learning and the multiple opportunities to engage in leadership roles that foster leadership development, organisational and leadership skills as well as decision making skills, this helps to instil in pre-service teachers a sense of ownership, authority, and pride in and over their projects. They are also exposed to circumstances that give them insights into their own personal strengths and weaknesses as service-learning presents them with opportunities that (i) increase and strengthen their openness to new experiences; (ii) encourage them to take risks and accept challenges; (iii) enhance their ability to make a difference; (iv) help them to develop the ability to persevere in difficult tasks; and (v) to seek and discover their own personal style of leadership and management. Thus, professional competence, confidence, personal efficacy, improved interpersonal skills, leadership, and organisational skills, as well as the other skills the pre-service teachers gain and strengthen through service-learning experiences, become a necessary foundation for the advancement of their life-long profession as teachers.

#### **4.2.2 Personal and professional growth and development through awareness of the real-life teaching environment context**

Galvan and Parker (2011:63, 66) note that service-learning provides a better perspective on teacher preparation than the traditional class setting approach because pre-service teachers engage with more realistic dimensions and situations that are only available in the real world. The pre-service teachers interact not just with the youth/or learners but also with learners' social and economic background where they are coming from, and thus get a sense and feel for who and what they are like and what their problem areas are. Thus, the pre-service teacher gets exposed to a more authentic form of teaching experience that helps them to be accustomed to the type of student population they would eventually meet and teach in schools. Furthermore, hands-on experiences with youth in their authentic community environment, help pre-service teachers to gain a better perspective on the teacher and teaching expectations by the learners, their families, and the community at large, before they start to teach in the schools.

Chiva-Bartoll *et al* (2020:5, 6) note that the increase of cultural and social awareness generated by participating in the service-learning program helps the students to (i) acquire a deeper knowledge of the problems/or challenges that a disadvantaged sector of the population faces; (ii) awareness of the difficult situation in which the recipients of the service live, and thus, generating a rethinking of their own well-being in comparison to those of others; and (iii) have a deeper understanding of the varied nature of learners they will have to teach, thus learn to work with the different groups that make up particular social realities.

As pre-service teachers find themselves immersed into real-world settings where they must deal with challenging situations, participate in finding solutions as well as working for the common good of the communities, they get to have some insights into the areas that may need educational reforms to adequately address some of the challenges currently experienced by learners, including those at the risk of social exclusion. Therefore, as Anderson (2000:1, 9) notes, they become "educated to take a leadership role in the improvement and restructuring of education to meet students' and society's needs more fully" and "gives them hope that they can do things differently, and better, than traditional teaching."

Also, to note is that through service-learning, pre-service teachers are exposed to and get to experience first-hand the realities and challenges a 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher faces daily, and this helps to prepare them for what Daniels, *et al* (2015:3) calls "the rigors and demands of the teaching profession". These realities, as noted by Resch and Schrittmesser (2021:10) include linguistic diversity, teaching children of diverse background, pupils with different academic ambitions, children in difficult life situations (e.g., dropouts, those with negative experiences of education, children with a migrant background and might not fully understand the local schooling system). Furthermore, service-learning exposes pre-service teachers to infrastructure-related challenges due to diversity and differences in resources and infrastructure at schools and how these have implications for children's learning.

#### **4.2.3 Personal and professional growth and development through authentic and relevant teaching practices**

Since service-learning ensures sustained engagement with community projects and the communities as a whole, Harfitt (2018:4) notes that pre-service teachers get the opportunity to "mature into community teachers" who (i) possess contextualised knowledge of the community and can work more effectively with children and families of diverse backgrounds; (ii) have developed a broader and more sophisticated understanding and appreciation of diversity, which is not possible through lectures and even formalised school settings; (iii) have been exposed to the full cultural context of families and communities, and

acquired sets of knowledge and skills that can only be found in the community outside the University or formalised school/ or classroom setting.

Therefore, as the pre-service teachers mature into community teachers, they (i) develop greater sensitivity toward the wider world and the cultural differences; (ii) become more self-aware to the dangers of labelling students based on assumptions; (iii) become aware of- and develop a way of communicating and giving instructions in a very different context to the usual 'learning' environment of classrooms and lecture rooms; (iv) develop transferable skills which are relevant to the teaching profession; and (v) develop and nurture mature and broader perceptions about teaching, which only time spent in community based projects could help them acquire unlike time spent in a formal school setting (Harfitt, 2018:8, 9, 11).

Exposure to children and people of a diverse background also leads to personal growth as it expands the pre-service teachers' simplistic descriptions and understanding of diversity, and thus see diversity in a positive manner in the sense that it is indeed a resource to be utilised for teaching. So, the pre-service teacher would eagerly harness and utilise the unique teaching/learning aids children bring to school from their homes as completed homework, different stories, and games the children bring and share with others in class, etc., and thus enrich the teaching/learning environment. In other words, as Hildenbrand and Schultz (2015:266) note, service-learning allows pre-service teachers "to view real world problems through multiple perspectives as they collaborate with community partners, the children they teach as well as each other as pre-service teachers, as they develop learning experiences and more relevant and meaningful activities to meet the goals of students and their community partners."

#### **4.2.4 Personal and professional growth and development through acquisition of skills and new dispositions**

Personal growth can also occur because many of the skills and new and relevant dispositions needed for successful teaching are enhanced in pre-service teachers who participate in service-learning activities. McKenna, *et al* (2004:75) note that such skills and dispositions include sensitivity to diversity issues, development of an ethic of care, increased compassion and concern, willingness to serve others, and increased complexity of thinking regarding problems of childhood, an increased belief in the ability of all children to learn, and enhanced awareness of individual differences. Other skills and dispositions which pre-service teachers develop as noted by Daniels, *et al* (2015:2) include (i) being creative and innovative; (ii) being independent solution-finders equipped to deal with problems never encountered before; (iii) ability to working with people never met before, many of whom have diverse values, cultures, experiences and expertise from themselves; (iv) becoming resourceful and taking the initiative to find and effectively use resources that are available to them in their communities. Other skills and dispositions which pre-service teachers develop as noted by Carrington and Saggars (2007:797-803) include (i) to help others by giving of themselves; (ii) ability to enter into caring relationship with others; (iii) keen awareness of societal inadequacies and injustices and willingness to remedy them; (iv) willingness and ability to integrate the central concerns of a community in the classroom and the school in general; (v) to create respectful and supportive bonds with learners in an environment built on mutual trust; (vi) developing empathy with people from a range of cultures; (vii) acknowledge and understand the variety of learner backgrounds; and (viii) be proactive in developing strategies that will be inclusive. Petker and Petersen (2014:122) note essential dispositions that come from personal growth as "seeing people outside formal education as experts who have something to contribute to education." Chiva-Bartoll *et al* (2020:2) note developing dispositions like (i) a genuine desire to benefit others without any expectation of benefit to oneself; (ii) empathy, cooperation, honesty, humility, kindness; (iii) the ability to share and help others,

and the desire to volunteer and make donations; and (iv) sense of social responsibility and social sensitivity as well as self-efficacy and prosocial behaviour.

Service-learning activities that encouraged an understanding of the diverse needs and backgrounds of future pupils, help in the professional development of a disposition to be more open and willing, because as Resch and Schritteser (2021:5) note, “pre-service teachers were far more willing to embrace inclusive teaching and teach diverse pupils than they were before the service-learning experience.” This is because the pre-service teachers felt that “the service-learning experience had equipped them with the skills and knowledge to respond appropriately to diversity and so could manage different students with different needs in their classroom, as well as being confident in differentiating assessment and planning for diversity.” They were able to do this from getting exposure to and understanding how students differ in approaches to learning and thus the importance of creating and adapting instructional opportunities and resources for diverse learners. Therefore, as Anderson (2000:1) says, service-learning “prepared pre-service teachers to function effectively in schools as they exist today” and become “educated to take a leadership role in the improvement and restructuring of education programs to meet students' and society's needs more fully.”

As service-learning helps to bridge the gap between the academic study programme and the students' future careers as teachers, it affords them opportunities to develop relevant practical skills and dispositions needed for the job, as noted by Resch and Schritteser (2021:7). This is because as the pre-service teachers engage with children, the service-learning activities help them to focus on acquiring future job-related skills, as they begin to have some insights into the practice of being a teacher. Thus, service-learning becomes a learning process for the job of being a teacher. Furthermore, as they interact with children of diverse backgrounds and see the impact, they as pre-service teachers have on such children or groups, they become aware that teaching is a socially responsible profession which affects children, parents and others in the community and society as a whole. They learn that teaching is not just about teaching content in the classroom.

#### **4.2.5 Personal and professional growth and development to use alternative pedagogy**

Exposure to and participating in service-learning helps in professional development in using service-learning effectively as a teaching method and philosophy of education. Therefore, when the pre-service teachers graduate, they, as McKenna, *et al* (2004:75) say “enter the teaching profession with preparation in and commitment to implement service-learning with their students.” Carrington and Sagers (2007:796) concur noting that service-learning should be integrated into teacher education “to improve the quality of teacher candidates and to prepare them to use service-learning in their own classrooms.” Therefore, it can be argued that service-learning would become one of the tools they would use to help their own students to develop critical-thinking, problem-solving and performance skills. Furthermore, pre-service teachers are also exposed to- and learn the importance of fostering relationships with colleagues, parents, community agencies and the larger community to support students' learning and well-being, which is something they will draw on in their teaching profession upon graduating.

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is characterised by globalisation and high migration rates, the expectations for future teaching and the teaching profession cannot be shaped by academic content and methodologies only, but also by approaches and methodologies which are also dictated by societal values and expectations. Therefore, engaging with the community through service-learning ought to be a key component of a teacher education programme. As Galvan and Parker (2011:58) note, such engagements provide the pre-service teachers with valuable learning experiences that permit them to increase their culturally responsive pedagogical skills and disposition. Chiva-Bartoll *et al* (2020:6) concur pointing out that this helps the pre-service teachers to step out of their comfort zone and be innovative in finding and

acquiring community-knowledge related to inclusive pedagogy and social values. Therefore, it can be argued that, understanding the essence of teaching from the community's perspective, and adjusting approaches and methodologies, accordingly, is what would make a teacher and the school they would teach at relevant to the community in which they are located.

### **5. Challenges with integrating service-learning in teacher education and the way forward**

Despite research findings that document the benefits of service-learning, incorporating service-learning and integrating it in existing education curricula remains a challenge in some institutions and countries. Some of the challenges emanate from teacher educators' own preferences and attitudes to practical teaching methods, applied coursework and the level of reflective practice they offer to students. Some of the challenges derive from resistance from pre-service teachers who feel that involvement in service-learning activities "should be intrinsically motivated and not simply a compulsory module in a degree programme" and scepticism "about students providing what should be a paid service and see an element of risk for workforce exploitation" (Resch and Schritteser, 2021:8). Other challenges arise from the demands associated with designing and implementing service-learning programs. Such demands arise from, among others, the need for constant communication, consultation and coordination with the community partners before and during the service-learning program; maintaining long-term partnerships with the community partners so as to be able to have meaningful service-learning programs on a yearly basis; facilitating meaningful and effective reflective thinking; negotiating appropriate service-learning activities and ensuring equal partnership with the community partners; the need for constant reassurance to students and to ensure students' safety to and from the service-learning sites. All these and other responsibilities and the paperwork involved are time-consuming work that could be strenuous. Some of the challenges require specific and unique solutions, while some of the solutions can be used for a wide range of challenges. Table 1 below presents some of the challenges and the corresponding solutions.

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Proposed solutions</i>
<i>Service-learning is not perceived as aligned with institutional mission, goals, roles, and rewards.</i>	<i>Need to work on aligning service-learning experiences with specific program goals and state/government and national standards as well as to encourage faculty members to engage in research and other scholarship focused on service-learning activities; * Give public recognition and salary rewards to faculty involved in service learning; * Show Deans and other administrators how service-learning can be a sound teaching method that addresses the institutional mission and core goals; * Get positive media coverage for School of Education service-learning efforts."</i>
<i>Some Faculty and administrators in institutions where mentors are also drawn on from outside the Faculty/School of Education are not interested in service learning.</i>	<i>Ensure Faculty and Administrators are clear about its role and ensure the curriculum supports it; * Work with service-learning champions on campus; * Recognise service-learning Faculty and Administrators through such means as awards; * Look for service-learning knowledge &amp; experience when hiring new teachers; * Publicise positive survey results; *Have training sessions to build capacity for service-learning.</i>
<i>Some Faculty members in the Faculty/School of Education are unprepared to use service-learning as a teaching method.</i>	<i>Have Faculty members and Administrators experienced with service-learning mentor those new to it; * Publicise principles of good practice, and model these principles in use of service-learning; * Make knowledge of service-learning and a commitment to use it part of the hiring criteria for new faculty and administrators; * Obtain service-learning professional development support from other institutions; Invite Faculty to attend service-learning training sessions to help to have a clear understanding of the concept, and the methods necessary to do it well.</i>
<i>Teacher education Faculty lack time necessary to implement service-learning.</i>	<i>Begin service-learning activities with a small pilot project that involves a small number of students, just one site or one course; *Add to this gradually so the work and stress level do not become overwhelming; * Monitor progress and expand service-learning over time; * Establish a campus-wide or school of education, service-learning centre; Hire a coordinator who works with faculty to set up and monitor service-learning placements.</i>
<i>Integrating, coordinating, and implementing service-learning is time consuming.</i>	<i>Arrange for teaching assistants; * Structure the Faculty reward system and workload to include the time and effort necessary to use service-learning.</i>
<i>The preservice teacher education curriculum is already overcrowded.</i>	<i>Work with Faculty members to help them shift from service-learning as an add-on to service-learning as an integrated method to achieve primary program goals; * Integrate the various elements of service-learning throughout a series of courses so that no one course gets overloaded; * Align service-learning activities with state/government and national standards for teacher preparation; * Hire Faculty and Administrators who are flexible, have a positive attitude and sufficient knowledge of service-learning to see opportunities to use it as a teaching method where others see barriers.</i>
<i>At Community level, planning and implementing service-learning projects can be a time consuming, logistical challenge. This together with increasing demands and shrinking resources.</i>	<i>Work with preservice teachers who are knowledgeable in the ways of service-learning; Include knowledge of and commitment to service-learning as required factors in hiring teachers and administrators; *Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for cooperating teachers that address issues of service-learning and working with adult learners; *Develop and maintain strong connections with local community agencies that will work with pre-service teachers on service-learning projects; *Develop an ever growing list of service-learning sites and opportunities; *Coordinate ongoing relationships that support best use of service-learning resources; *Prepare all administrators to ensure they are knowledgeable about service-learning, publicly support its use and can provide resources to enhance its success; *Develop a service-learning advisory committees; *Ensure that service-learning policies are backed with sufficient funding and resources needed to hire service-learning staff, to provide professional development in service-learning, and to provide transportation, and materials for students engaged in service-learning activities; *Provide resources to support the development of service-learning initiatives that involve collaborative partnerships including teacher education programs, schools and other community organisations; *Develop and nurture partnerships to provide service-learning preparation to mixed groups of pre-service and in-service teachers; *Recognise and reward teacher education Faculty and Administrators who develop excellent service-learning programs.</i>

*Table 1: Some of the challenges faced in integrating service-learning in teacher education and the way forward*Source: Own Table using Anderson (2000:2-13); McKenna, et al (2004:76, 77); Daniels (2015:3); Castle and Osman (2003:110); Petker and Petersen (2014:126, 131).

## 6. Conclusion

Service-learning is a teaching approach that gives students opportunities to participate in service activities that help them to link content, curriculum theory and practice, thus solidifying theory to practice, and thus have a deeper understanding of course/curriculum content. Service-learning also helps in the personal and professional growth of the pre-service teachers as well as preparing them for their teaching profession. The leadership skills they develop, the broader perception they gain regarding the children they will meet in class, as well as the broader perspective of the role and responsibilities of a teacher are assets which would help prepare them for their profession. However, even though research has shown the importance and relevance of service-learning as an integral part of any teacher education program, challenges remain in embracing and utilising service-learning more fully in teacher education programmes. The challenges arise from, among other things, resistance by some pre-service teachers as they feel that it should be optional, the feeling by some Faculty and Administrators that the curriculum is already burdened by existing programmes and as such service-learning would only be an additional burden, and resource constraints to implement service-learning activities. While there is indeed a need to inject more resources to implement service-learning, there is also a need for ongoing training and awareness to all stakeholders on the relevance of service-learning and the need to have it as an integral part of the teacher education program and not to be an “add on”.

## 7. Limitations of this study

The use of service-learning in teacher preparation programs is relatively new and therefore, few Universities around the world have this in their teacher education programmes. Therefore, this limits literature available to thoroughly explore the rationale, advantages, and difficulties of service-learning in teacher education programs. Since this is still an expanding field of study, the literature reviewed in this study was based on service-learning programmes at some universities in Australia, United States of America, and some European countries. No literature could be accessed on work done in other regions like Asia, Africa, and South America.

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