



Transformative Learning Experiences of Students in Repurposed Service-Learning Projects During COVID-19 at a University of Technology

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ABSTRACT

The potential of transformative learning through repurposed service-learning initiatives is explored by examining the transformative learning experiences of three first-year Communication students of Marketing from a university of technology in South Africa while implementing service-learning projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. To examine the differences between service-learning projects during the pandemic and the traditional face-to-face models, traditional service-learning frameworks are explored and the motivation for adapting traditional service-learning is explained. The study used a qualitative research approach to examine the viewpoints of participants. To assess student transformative learning, the Transformative Learning Theory is employed as a lens. Participants were interviewed and their verbatim statements constituted the data analyzed using thematic analysis. A deductive coding approach was used as data was analyzed and a set of established themes served as the foundation for the discussion of the findings. The transformative learning experiences of the participants are discussed to illustrate how service-learning projects can be repurposed. It is evident that communication skills were practiced, and transformative learning occurred. As a result, "home-based" service-learning is recommended as a form of alternative service-learning. The article contributes to the current education climate in which teaching methodologies require increased flexibility and innovation.

KEYWORDS: Communication Skills; COVID-19; Experiences; Higher Education; Service-Learning; Transformative

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020 and a global public health disaster ensued (World Health Organization, 2020). According to Toguero (2020), COVID-19 affected higher education institutions in all 188 countries as of April 06, 2020. To contain the global spread of the pandemic, educational institutions such as colleges, schools, and universities had to alter their teaching and learning methods (Karakose, 2021; Khan, 2021). An urgent shift to emergency remote learning and teaching was required (Mafenya, 2021).

Service learning (SL), a type of experiential learning (Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 2015), challenges students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-world situations through face-to-face interactions with community members. During the pandemic, this was impossible as interaction with other individuals was restricted to curtail transmission of the virus. Due to the pandemic, many SL projects in universities had to be cancelled or suspended (Indiana University, 2020; Tian & Noel, 2020; Pfeiffer, Baker & Mascorro, 2021; Kehl, Patil, Tagorda, Nelson-Hurtiz, 2022). Other universities had to rethink and restructure how SL could be implemented remotely (Hong Kong Polytechnic, 2020; Hassett, 2021). Rather

than suspending, postponing, or cancelling SL during the COVID-19 outbreak, many lecturers challenged students to be original and creative in delivering a contactless SL or a SL that required minimal contact with other individuals (Tian & Noel, 2020). This is where this research study is positioned as the author encouraged students to implement repurposed SL projects rather than postponing or cancelling the projects during the pandemic. This is in line with the thoughts of Roy (2020) stated below.

Roy's (2020) conceptualisation of the pandemic as a portal proposes that the pandemic should be viewed as an epistemic opportunity for humans: "Pandemics have compelled humanity to break with the past and imagine their world anew." The COVID-19 pandemic allowed educators to review teaching and learning strategies and develop new techniques that can assist students in learning more effectively (Hlatshwayo et al., 2021).

Current SL Models

To understand the differences between the SL projects undertaken before and during the pandemic, an insight into current SL models is necessary. Bohat and Goodrich (2007) identify six models of SL, namely, the placement model, project model, product model, presentation model, presentation plus model, and event model. What is common to all the models is community contact as a necessity for SL projects to be executed effectively. Heffernan (2001), in the book *Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction*, identifies six different models: a "pure model", discipline-based, problem-based, capstone courses, service internships, and the undergraduate community-based action research model. The dominant theme that emerges from these models is structure.

The projects require participants to follow specific steps to execute the goals effectively. The 8-block model (Laine,

2016), basic model, and PARE (preparation, action, reflection, evaluation) (University of Maryland, 1999), bear similarities to the other models as community contact and sequential steps seem to be necessary for the successful implementation of SL projects. Consequently, a common thread that runs through all of these models is limited flexibility.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the SL projects could not adhere to all of the stages outlined in the preceding models. The models provide no alternative way of facilitating the projects than completing the various phases through physical contact. The methods necessitate collaboration with community members, group efforts, and close supervision by SL lecturers to enable the successful implementation of SL initiatives. There were limited SL opportunities as individuals established boundaries to limit interaction with others. Health and safety concerns were raised, and additional measures needed to be taken which made SL more challenging and time-consuming. Students were required to think critically about conducting initiatives that did not require integration into the community or connection with group members in close proximity. In addition, they were obliged to work on their own due to the limited involvement of group members and lecturers during remote learning. The students had to adapt to the changing educational environment manifested by the pandemic.

Defining Service-Learning

Community engagement relates to a range of activities through which the university communicates with the neighboring communities in some form. The aim is to respond to the varying needs of the communities (Matthews, 2019). Service-learning is a particular form of community engagement that combines academic learning and meeting the needs of the community. Eyler and Giles (1999)

suggest that there is a plethora of different definitions of SL as a concept.

Osman and Petersen's definition (2013:7) frames the study: "Service-learning is a way of thinking about education and learning with an accompanying teaching tool or strategy that asks students to learn and develop through active participation in service activities to meet defined issues in community organizations. There is reciprocity in the exchange between students and the community." The services provided by the students are determined in collaboration with community partners.

Service-learning is part of the student's academic curriculum and provides structured opportunities for them to write, talk, and reflect on the services they provide. This assists students in developing into caring citizens (Osman & Petersen, 2013). The growing body of literature on SL highlights that well-designed SL projects present a platform for learners to achieve positive learning outcomes (Furco, 1996; Celio et al., 2011; Rutti et al., 2016). Previous studies on SL indicate that it improves students' learning and creates social awareness of local contexts as well as on the global platform (McCarthy, 2009). Elyer (2000) and Kiely (2004) illustrate that SL contributes to personal development, social skills, the understanding of global issues, improved intercultural communication skills, as well as improved language skills. Consequently, SL is popular and continues to grow in South Africa (Osman & Castle, 2006; Osman & Attwood, 2007).

Service-learning can be described as a flexible pedagogy in the sense that it utilizes various service opportunities and can be used in more than one classroom environment (Laine, 2016). Meyer (2009) hypothesizes that students who engage in SL activities would perform better in the classroom and continues by stating that they have higher graduation rates and

exhibit greater cultural sensitivity. In the same line of thought, Gredely (2015) believes that SL courses might be the setting where students develop empathy and caring. Other scholars contend that SL offers transformative potential for students (Elyer & Giles, 1999; Kiely, 2004).

Teaching Service-Learning

Communication is taught to first-year students in the Marketing Department at a university of technology. It is a one-year programme that requires students to attend three hours of weekly contact lectures. Communication is a discipline that emphasizes the development of communication skills for efficient workplace and societal communication. It aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to develop self-confidence, intelligence, and social skills. The Communication module teaches students the importance of reading, academic writing skills, information literacy skills, listening, oral presentations, small group communication, and intercultural communication. Critical thinking is a key part of the Communication course and is incredibly valuable for a SL project. Students with critical thinking abilities are capable of analysing, evaluating, and synthesizing information, as well as making well-informed decisions and overcoming obstacles.

However, the students' interaction with others was limited unless debates were set up outside of the syllabus to encourage students to participate. This limited the student's ability to practice the communication skills being learned in the classroom. Additionally, it was evident in discussions that students did not have a holistic view of what is happening in communities in South Africa. For students to successfully graduate from universities, a consciousness of caring must be ignited in them and one of the best ways of achieving

this is by enabling them to integrate with the various communities.

The objective of the SL learning projects in the Communication module is to provide students with significant opportunities for community service, application of academic concepts in authentic circumstances, and enrichment of their learning experiences. In addition, the purpose of the SL project is to foster students' critical thinking, leadership, and communication abilities while tackling community issues (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Holland & Ramaley, 2008). The integration of academic and social concepts was intended to enhance student learning in their Communication class (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Service-learning is seen as a transformative pedagogy as it fosters personal and social development by integrating critical thought and action in authentic environments. Integration of service and learning is essential to the transformative aspect of this approach because it allows students to apply their academic knowledge to real-world situations and challenges them to develop a deeper understanding of social concerns and their role in effecting positive change (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Students develop an awareness of themselves and their surrounding communities through personal transformation and a desire to make a meaningful impact. However, finishing SL projects during the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic proved challenging, and students were expected to continue executing their SL projects using critical thinking.

SL Projects during COVID-19

During the pandemic, students were requested to think of innovative and creative ways of implementing SL projects in their communities while maintaining social distancing and upholding COVID-19-related health and safety regulations. When constructing a SL project,

participants were required to demonstrate the application of communication skills such as academic writing, listening, oral presentations, small group communication, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication to their SL projects. The facilitator adopted a hands-off approach to encourage students to be the driving forces of their projects.

Many of the students chose to assist family members who they believe are part of the community. Some students who had mothers as breadwinners of their families decided to lessen their mothers' burdens by assisting with responsibilities at home, such as being the chef when the mother returns home after work. Others chose to perform do-it-yourself chores around the house to save on paying contracted individuals to get the tasks done. Some students volunteered their time and effort at local soup kitchens that were feeding hundreds of individuals daily.

The first difference between these innovative projects and pre-COVID-19 SL projects was that students did not integrate with community members the way they did before. Students, group members, and individuals in the community did not collaborate. In this scenario, students seem to have chosen projects to help lessen the strain felt by so many during the pandemic. Secondly, pre-COVID-19 SL projects lasted for the duration of the academic year, allowing students to form relationships with community partners. However, during the pandemic, this was not the case. Relationships outside the home were not formed due to the social distancing policies.

Students chose to implement their SL projects at home, which may have been owing to its accessibility. Due to the pandemic, the country was on lockdown, making it difficult for students to leave their homes. Thus, it appears that implementing projects at home was the best option for students. In addition, the home-based

concept assisted students in surmounting the physical hurdles that were erected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the format was modified, it was necessary to assess whether or not students' chosen home-based SL projects fulfilled the Communication subject learning outcomes. It was essential to assess if transformative learning occurred as SL, is a transformative pedagogy. The section that follows will examine these areas.

Theoretical Lens

It was vital to ascertain whether students still experienced transformative learning when implementing their home-based projects. Service-learning is a pedagogical strategy that blends academic learning with community involvement to provide students with transforming experiences. This process involves critical thinking and challenges students' viewpoints, which may result in personal development and heightened social consciousness (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996). Moreover, SL can allow collaboration and communication among group members and communities with potentially diverse backgrounds (Eyler & Giles, 1999). So, this discourse can aid students in developing empathy and respect for others, as well as intercultural competency, which are all essential components of transformative learning. Therefore, the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is employed as the theoretical lens to comprehend the students' learning experiences, as it closely aligns with SL, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

The Transformative Learning Theory was used as the lens to identify transformative learning. Mezirow (1990; 1994) maintains that four contexts need to be understood to make sense of learning:

one is a frame of reference through which one uses to construe reality, a second is a process of

communication-language mastery, the codes which delimit categories, constructs, and labels and how problematic assertions are validated, the third involves a line of action which brings intention, purpose and will bear on both perception and cognition and the fourth is the situation encountered by the learner (1990, p. 143).

Three key components are necessary for transformative learning to occur. According to Mezirow (1990), SL is associated with experience, critical thinking, and reasoned dialogue. The first experience students have with SL is typically one that could challenge their current perspectives. Before views of the experience are established, reflection on the experience may happen, which could lead to talks with community members or other students within the group to make sense of the experience. It is possible that transformative learning could occur through the mechanism described above. This article tries to determine whether home-based SL models led to transformative learning in the form of perceptions or personal growth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative study

The basic characteristic of qualitative research is that it investigates how individuals make meaning of their own tangible and real-life experiences in their minds and language. When individuals are asked how they comprehend certain parts of their lives, they frequently respond using everyday language and concepts. The resulting data is referred to as "narratives" (Cropley, 2021). The qualitative method was relevant to this inquiry since it was necessary to understand students' lived experiences conducting SL projects amid the COVID-19 pandemic by listening to their stories. Qualitative researchers are concerned with individuals' personal views, experiences, and meaning perspectives (Ismail et.al, 2021).

Analysis of the students' spoken words and remarks provided a true insight into their transformative learning experiences.

Sampling

All 180 students who were enrolled in the Communication module were expected to undertake SL projects. This was not feasible during the pandemic as students faced many challenges and could not implement SL projects effectively. Consequently, a total of 20 students completed SL projects. However, despite encouragement and gentle reminders during their online Communication classes, only four students prioritised time to participate in this study and commit to online semi-structured interviews. This highlighted the impact of the pandemic in two ways. Firstly, no contact classes diminished the opportunity to address students face-to-face about the details of the project. Secondly, students were struggling with connectivity and data issues and chose not to participate in the study. Four students eventually committed to participate in this inquiry. Three of the four students implemented different home-based SL projects. As a result, the article focuses on these home-based SL projects. The fourth student's data was irrelevant to this study because the SL project involved feeding homeless people.

Data Collection Procedures

To collect data, a semi-structured interview (SSI) guide was employed because it allowed students to speak freely and enabled the researcher to have a full understanding of students' learning while they were implementing SL projects during the pandemic. Semi-structured interviews are well-known for their ability to engage in deep conversation (Kakilla, 2021), which was the intention. This was done to have a better grasp of students' genuine feelings about working on a SL project during the pandemic. The interview questions focused on SL projects that were implemented

during COVID-19 and student transformative learning experiences. To make it more convenient, the SSIs were conducted online and planned around the students' schedules. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The Microsoft Teams application was used to record all SSIs.

Data Analysis

Manual coding was used in this study. Coding can be defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based on visual data" (Saldana, 2013:3). According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), for smaller projects with insufficient data, a basic solution such as colour coding with markers would suffice. In line with this thinking, the transcripts were read and re-read, and different coloured pens were used to highlight data relating to two themes of investigation in the study. The first theme was repurposed SL projects, and the second theme was student transformative learning. In this deductive coding approach, researchers usually start with a set of established themes created before the coding process begins (Saldana, 2013). The questions asked focused on the two main themes mentioned. The respondents' verbatim statements relating to these themes were analysed for insight and understanding.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance for the research was obtained from the institution's Research Ethics Committee, granting permission to use the students' opinions and views on post-COVID-19 SL projects. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016), obtaining ethical clearance is crucial when dealing with human subjects as it helps to ensure that the study is designed and executed ethically. The students who volunteered to participate in this investigation were assured that all

data provided would remain confidential and would be respected. Furthermore, additional steps were taken to further guarantee the ethical standards of the research. Firstly, verbal consent was obtained from the students to respect every individual's rights (Jardine & James, 2012). Secondly, they were given consent forms to sign. Thirdly, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were placed within Heidegger's (1982) and Husserl's (1981) descriptive interpretative approaches to understanding the key issues addressed. This technique allows for the identification of human experiences of the events as recounted by the participants and it assumes that meaning is not directly available to understand but must be interpreted. Researchers' basic contact with the phenomenon, according to Heidegger (1982) is through lived experiences, and it is predicated on the assumption that all forms of human knowledge are interpretive. The outcomes of data-gathering methodologies used in creating a more comprehensive picture of student transformative learning throughout their SL projects are reported next. Additionally, the application of their communication skills is discussed.

Theme 1: Student learning

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional SL project implementation allowed students to engage with communities and put classroom theories and principles into practice. This was impracticable during the pandemic. Consequently, students were urged to implement projects with minimal human contact to enable them to follow all health and safety procedures. They proved to be imaginative and inventive by combining ideas that needed little interaction with individuals. To determine whether students experienced transformative learning during their involvement in repurposed SL projects

in the wake of COVID-19, Mezirow's TLT (1990; 1994) was used to gain insight. Transformative learning occurs in four stages, according to the TLT. Firstly, the student is confronted with a perplexing dilemma (experience), then reflects on that experience (critical reflection), then engages in rational discourse (communication), and new knowledge is produced, or existing knowledge is altered (Mezirow, 1990). According to the data collected, each of the three students claimed that transformative learning occurred and all three of the students applied different communication skills. Regarding education, the following was reported:

Participant 1: Assisted in the family home.

"I did learn from my mother and sisters." Participant 1's family reminded him that he should speak clearly and properly, rather than mumble his remarks. He heeded the advice and improved his delivery. Therefore, he realised that *"when we communicate, we must be clear"*. This corresponds to the material covered in the Communication module. Students are required to learn how to communicate properly and successfully with others in both their spoken and non-verbal interactions. This student's learning experience would have been abruptly transitioning to learning remotely, according to Mezirow's (1990) TLT. He was told to speak properly to be understood during the conversations between him and his family members (rational discourse). He became more conscious of the importance of communicating effectively with other individuals as a result of his reflection (critical reflection). The student's communication skills were altered during his home-based SL project.

This student worked as part of a team with family members to assist with chores around the house during the COVID-19 pandemic. *"My family and I worked as a team you know."* Throughout this period of teamwork, he gained the

ability to speak more clearly. It may be deduced from the fact that they were assisting one another with domestic duties that the community here was family and that all members of the team benefited. The project aligned with the learning objective of the communication module, which was for students to exhibit the capacity to work in small groups and to learn how to have clear and effective communication. Working in groups and learning to communicate effectively can support transformative learning as students are exposed to a variety of perspectives. This exposure challenged the student's current views and assumptions and prompted him to reconsider critically his viewpoint on the way he communicates and decide to enhance his communication skills. Therefore, transformative learning has occurred.

Participant 2: Tutoring at home.

"I pushed him to speak out and not be shy by teaching him about active listening and engagement because he is always so quiet in class." "I'm also teaching him patience, something I learned as well." In this scenario, the participant was practicing her listening skills which she had learned in her communication module. Personal development is also mentioned by this participant, who taught her son and herself the value of patience. The participant was forced to stay at home and work as a Tutor for her young primary school-aged son, which was a new experience for her. It gave her a fresh understanding of the value of patience. Even though one of the TLT variables, reflection, was missing, it could be said that transformative learning occurred. This student grew more self-aware of her teaching abilities and improved her listening abilities. Personal development resulted in a transformation as a consequence of her increased self-awareness. The community was her son. She attentively listened to her young son to

successfully instruct him, and her tolerance for him allowed them both to learn patience and to listen attentively. *"We spent time together and I taught him actively listening skills and how to actively engage."* As a person actively listens to those they are serving, they come to comprehend their viewpoints and challenges. Listening may be a strong tool for altering service work because it increases comprehension of the issues being addressed and facilitates the development of more meaningful relationships with the individuals being served.

Participant 3: Home Nail Bar Salon

"I learned how to interact with others; for example, if someone asks for a specific shape from me, I must first figure out what form she wants." To provide ladies with a break during the day, a student started a Nail Bar Salon as her SL project. Husbands and children were home from work and school during the pandemic, which made demands on women in households onerous. Consequently, this student thought that giving them a break by painting their nails, without charging them for the service, would help them cope. The student needed to speak clearly and effectively with the ladies for this to be successful. She drew on what she had learned in her communication module on effective communication skills. This student also mentioned personal growth: *"I learned to be independent."* Transformative learning occurred when examined within Mesirow's (1990; 1994) TLT paradigm. The nail bar was a new experience (disorienting dilemma), involving interaction with the community's females (logical discourse), a new awareness (reflection), and a new perspective of being more autonomous as well as being able to communicate well. This student experienced transformative pedagogy in more than one area of her life.

This student displayed the good communication skills she acquired in the

Communication module by attentively listening to the ladies' (community) requests for different sorts of nails. Additionally, this student exhibited critical thinking skills. She witnessed the angst of the women who had to work longer hours at home because their husbands and children were also at home. In response, she considered creating a home nail bar salon where she would do the nails of one lady at a time to adhere to safety and health regulations. Her service to the ladies was beneficial as it gave them a break from their long days and an opportunity to do something for themselves. Critical thinking and transformative learning are closely related since both require challenging assumptions, examining diverse viewpoints, and acquiring new insights and comprehension. These procedures are crucial for personal and intellectual progress, which appears to be the case with this student. It has helped her develop as a person and become more knowledgeable about the world's constant transformation.

Transformative learning achieved by participants.

The development of a critical self, one that investigates what is known to provide solutions based on formal knowledge and abilities, is at the heart of SL (Caspersz & Olaru, 2017). Transformative learning or learning that transforms the self by developing an alternative way of thinking about what is currently known, is characterised by the operationalisation of this dynamic (Mezirow, 1997). Reflection is a key element in the transformation process. In Mezirow's (1990) TLT, reflection is an essential phase for transformative learning to take place. While the students did not specifically claim that transformative learning occurred through reflection, they did infer it. All students mentioned self-knowledge and how they needed to work towards improving developing areas, implying that reflection possibly occurred.

For example, until she started giving her son tutorial lessons at home, Participant 2 had no idea how impatient she was. She did, however, remark on becoming conscious of her impatience and the need to teach patience to both her and her child. It may be argued that she arrived at this decision after reflecting on her tutoring abilities.

Another crucial aspect of SL is reciprocity, which is defined as an engagement between two or more parties that is mutually beneficial (Barton, 2020). Reciprocity was evident in all three home-based SL experiments. *"I loved spending time with him (son) and also creating a close relationship with him"*, said Participant 2. She not only formed a stronger relationship with her son by taking on the duty of tutoring him for her SL project, but they both learned from each other as well. In the case of Participant 3, she offered a free service to the community's ladies from her home. She was able to put her communication abilities to good use by opening a nail bar, where the ladies could learn about nails while having them done.

"I enjoyed helping around the house, I got to spend more time with family and do things like you know, as a team", said Participant 1. The student not only learned the value of teamwork, which is encouraged in SL, but it is evident from his statement that everyone in the household cooperated in doing tasks. Everyone benefited from the experience in this way. Another key aspect of the home-based SL projects was that they met the Communication subject's learning outcomes. Students are taught to think critically and to take responsibility for their education. Students demonstrated this by implementing SL projects following all health and safety requirements enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the SL initiatives provided an opportunity for the students to practice oral communication by facilitating interactions with others nearby. The second part of this

investigation was to gain insight into the SL frameworks used as the traditional frameworks posed many challenges during the pandemic (Tian & Noel, 2020).

Theme 2: SL framework

Traditional SL frameworks worked well before the COVID-19 pandemic, as stated earlier. Current models of SL were called into question during the pandemic because they require students to interact with communities and community members and apply their learning in the real world. For health and safety considerations, this was not possible during the pandemic.

Students in the first-year Communication class were challenged to think imaginatively and innovatively about their projects. They needed to use the abilities they were acquiring in their communication module to undertake community service while adhering to the health and safety protocols. The students faced a difficult situation because they were terrified of contracting the COVID-19 virus but still wanted to complete a project. All three students implemented home-based projects. These home-based projects were the best solutions for the students as they were not allowed to socialise or interact with large groups during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the participants chose to see their families as the “community.” This was not only minimising contact with other people but adhering to the health protocols that were instituted.

Osman and Petersen's (2013) definition of SL includes four key points: active participation by students in meeting community needs; mutual understanding between students and the community; service that is aligned with the academic curriculum of the students and provides a framework in which students can apply what they have learned; and development of students as caring citizens. All four pivotal elements were met through the students' SL

efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, all three participants identified a problem and provided a solution. Secondly, the three participants and their chosen “community” shared a common concept as they were all experiencing the pandemic together. Thirdly, the service that the students offered allowed them to put their communication skills learned in the classroom to use. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they learned to care about what they were doing and for the individuals for whom they were doing it. All these factors aided the students in becoming community-minded citizens. Essentially, it met the requirements for SL to be a transformative pedagogy. Therefore, it could be argued that home-based SL is a type of SL.

Roy's (2020) clarion appeal regarding the pandemic as a portal can assist in not just reflecting on the pandemic teaching and learning experiences and practices, but also in being open to re-imagine and re-look at teaching delivery. In light of this, it is essential to acknowledge that the education landscape is one of perpetual change and creativity. The COVID-19 pandemic could be used as a springboard to new and inventive teaching methods to appropriately align with the current education climate.

CONCLUSION

The article documents student transformative learning through SL projects that were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two significant themes emerged from the SSI data: student transformative learning and SL frameworks. The analysis also reveals that other types of SL, such as home-based SL, should be considered. Amid the pandemic, traditional SL models could not continue. As a result, the students effectively implemented alternative home-based SL models. Despite the reconfiguration of SL projects to fit the COVID-19 environment, student transformative learning persisted, and the communities benefited.

It may be argued that in a time when movement is restricted by a pandemic, adapting instructional approaches is a necessity. It is critical to assess and decide whether a reinvented teaching tool is effective. As educators, it is important to be receptive to alternative forms of teaching when they prove to be effective. In this inquiry, students took the initiative to implement their SL projects differently from conventional SL projects, and they were successful. However, this may not always be the case. Therefore, effective

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- planning and communication between SL lecturers and students are essential. Despite various restrictions, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a wide-ranging change in education (Mafenya, 2021). Adaptations made to SL as pedagogy to meet the COVID-19 climate are outlined in this article. A larger sample size could have made a stronger case for home-based SL, but it is suggested that home-based SL be considered as a form of SL in the future.
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