EFL teachers' perceived challenges of implementing service-learning in higher education

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning has gained popularity in global education due to its effective blending of academic instruction with practical community service experiences. Despite its transformative potential, this model poses significant challenges that have been overlooked in scholarly research. This is most evident in the Vietnamese educational landscape, where educators struggle with the unfamiliarity of service-learning and its incorporation into existing courses. Therefore, this study endeavored to explore the challenges Vietnamese EFL teachers experience when service-learning is implemented in higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers and subsequently analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings identified four key aspects, namely students' lack of commitment, workload, insufficient resources, and time constraints. Based on these challenges, this study provides pedagogical implications for teachers and administrators to grasp the obstacles of adapting service-learning, paving the way for innovative plans and reforms in Vietnam's educational system.

1. Introduction

Traditional education is frequently criticized for positioning adult norms and subject matter on maturing persons, which can lead to a disconnect from learners' actual experiences (Dewey, 1938). In response to such critiques, service-learning emerges as a pedagogical strategy that encourages reconciling the theoretical and practical divide across diverse educational settings. In Asian countries, service-learning has acquired appeal as a new effective pedagogical approach to educational systems (Xing & Ma, 2010) without the exception of the Vietnamese setting. Specifically, albeit implicitly, the education policies (e.g., The National Assembly, 2019) and the learning and practice philosophy (Nguyen, 2015) encourage students to be versatile and sensitive to their specialized profession to aid local communities, which is also one of the primary outcomes that service-learning aspires to. As a result, numerous educational settings, ranging from elementary through high school to several tertiary education levels, commonly implement service-learning into their curriculum. The growing popularity of this pedagogy can also be ascribed in part to the myriad benefits it delivers to the community, educators, students, and institutions.

However, the plethora of advantages linked with service-learning frequently overshadows any contemplation of its difficulties or negative facets. For example, incorporating service-learning into the curriculum necessitates rigorous planning and

coordination, which may strain academic departments' already limited resources. In addition, service-learning programs may lack institutional buy-in and strategic integration with academic institutions' overall missions and priorities. Instead, service-learning largely depends on the efforts of a handful of faculty members, resulting in increased obligations and obstacles in their roles. Furthermore, scant attempts have been undertaken in Vietnam to identify the barriers that arise while implementing service-learning practice, and the majority focus on mixed or quantitative methodologies connected to student service-learning positive outcomes (Hoang, 2020; Nguyen & Bao Dat, 2021). Likewise, Eby (1998) claims that the fervor and exhilaration surrounding the service-learning movement, propelled by enticing reports about the advantages of merging academics with social responsibility, disguise "troubling issues" (p. 2). Butin (2010) contends that a limited body of educational research on such difficulties throttles the prospect of executing a systematically revolutionary approach to teaching and learning (pedagogical, institutional, and existential), and it hypothesizes the long-term repercussions of such a transformative model. As a result, this study aims to explore the challenges EFL teachers face when service-learning is implemented in higher education. The research question is formulated as follows.

What challenges do EFL teachers encounter when service-learning is implemented at a private university?

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Definition of service-learning

The 1967 coining of service-learning as an internship program was a crucial initial step toward conceptual clarity (Giles & Eyler, 1994). On this point, as a program, Jacoby (2014) wraps up that service-learning is an activity or collection of initiatives that allow students to perform tasks that cater to human and community needs in conjunction with planned reflection in pursuit of targeted learning outcomes. In addition to a program, service-learning gains recognition as a philosophy. As described by Kendall and Associates (1990), service-learning is a "human growth and purpose, a social vision, an approach to community, and a way of knowing" (p. 23). While service-learning can be described as a program or philosophy, as specified above, it is most commonly defined as a form of education. In brief, given the university's broad commitment to service-learning courses and its alignment with Bringle and Hatcher's (1996) conceptualization, this study will employ their interpretation as its guiding paradigm.

2.2. Models of service-learning

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to incorporating service with academic learning. As proof, Heffernan (2001) concisely labels service-learning models into six distinct groups. First, pure service-oriented learning programs cater to volunteers, students, and engaged citizens and they hardly intersect with any particular discipline. Second, discipline-based service-learning courses anticipate that students will be involved in the community throughout the semester and will periodically reflect on their experiences, using the content guided in class as a framework for their analysis and comprehension. Third, in problem-based service-learning courses, students respond to the community in the same way as "consultants" work for a "client" (Heffernan, 2001, p. 3). Fourth, capstone courses are solely accessible to seniors or exceptional juniors. These students synthesize their grasp of the subject by tying classroom knowledge with meaningful community service. Fifth, service internship programs, like traditional internships, compel students to serve in the community for a set length of hours

each week. As opposed to traditional internships, service internship programs lend regular and ongoing reflective opportunities for students to critically evaluate their new experiences through the use of discipline-based theories. Sixth, community-based action research calls for students to obtain research methodology whilst retaining to serve as advocates for communities and tackle issues of community concern. Each model employs a distinct approach to assess student learning and the program's effectiveness.

2.3. Challenges of service-learning in higher education

Despite their merits, traditional fields of study have been hesitant to incorporate experiential learning into their curricula. This is in part because, compared to traditional education, experiential learning requires more planning. Time constraints are an overwhelming logistical challenge that is frequently brought up whilst implementing service-learning (Eby, 1998; Ma & Lo, 2016). As per George-Paschal et al. (2019), other course content must occasionally be dropped to create room for service-learning. Ma and Lo (2016) explain that course materials utilized in one academic year may not be interoperable with those used in the following. It implies that more effort and time must be expended upon developing course materials and teaching the subject matter than is required for courses with predetermined content. Furthermore, creating effective assessment criteria and techniques is crucial for assessing the performance of service-learning activities. To incorporate experiential learning, educators must take on a new role beyond the traditional classroom. Similarly, in a service-learning class, the teacher's role shifts significantly so that students assume greater responsibility. Particularly, the existence of service-learning programs that bring students out of the classroom and away from direct instructor supervision may raise reservations about control over learning outcomes. Furthermore, Harrison et al. (2014) claim that service-learning challenges teachers with profoundly atypical views of a course, how it should be organized and structured, and what is and is not intended to happen in it, just as it challenges students. Prior studies also identify challenges with authentic assessment in service-learning due to its complex procedures (Harrison et al., 2014; Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2008).

2.4. Previous studies

The problems of utilizing service-learning in higher education have their roots in published studies from the past few years, spanning globally, in Asian countries, and the Vietnamese context. For instance, George-Paschal et al. (2019) conducted an exploratory qualitative approach to study the experiences of service-learning participants, such as students, professors, and community partners, at a four-year public institution. Thematic analysis was used to evaluate the data, which briefly touched on the problems that faculty members encounter, such as the significant amount of time required to create and conduct service-learning initiatives. Yusof et al. (2020) conducted another qualitative study in which Malaysian lecturers and students discussed the problems they faced when participating in service learning. Focus group participants identified a theory-practice gap, but professors interviewed individually highlighted organizational support concerns. Both sides struggled to win over the community's trust. Later, Camus et al. (2022) did a qualitative study on the difficulties seventeen instructors experienced while evaluating students in academic service-learning classes. Themes were identified via content analysis. The findings included challenges such as group management in different locations, workload, and institutional assessment standards. Early attempts in Vietnam, such as Nguyen's (2021) multisite case study, investigated the origins, obstacles, and possibilities of service-learning implementation. Her study covered educators, students, community partners, rectors, deans, and managers from

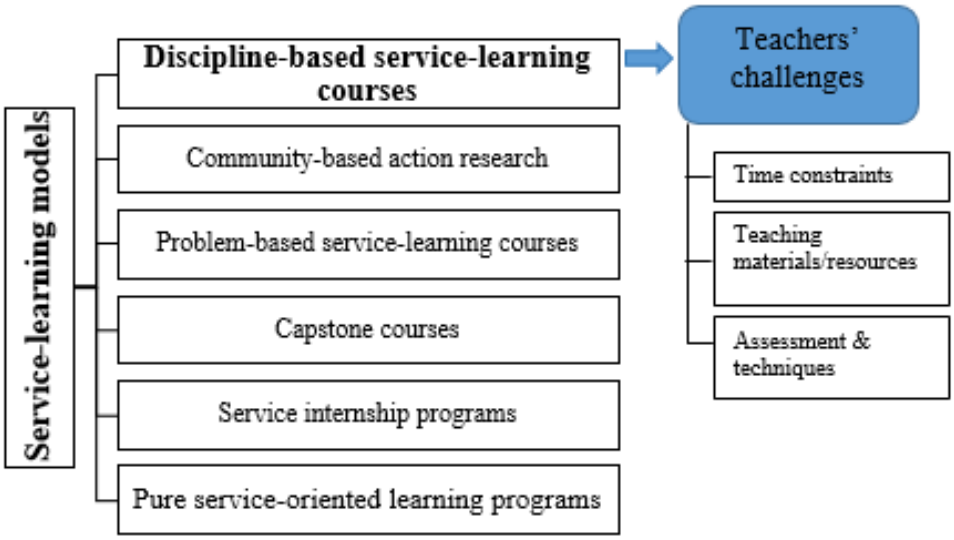
four institutions in Vietnam. Interview, document, and observation data identified substantial challenges, such as power relations, Western approach acceptance, and insufficient institutional support. Within the same year, Nguyen and Bao Dat (2021) conducted a case study to help improve service-learning programs and student learning. Twenty-eight pre-service teachers used written journals to reflect on placement experiences. Using interpretive qualitative approaches and thematic analysis, the study found issues such as children's conduct and the inexperience of pre-service teachers with service-learning model. Concisely, while existing research recognizes the value of service-learning in several educational settings, it typically overlooks the nuances that hamper implementation. This scarcity of detailed assessments is particularly evident in Vietnam, where service-learning is still in its infancy. Sociocultural disparities between Western and Vietnamese educational systems aggravate these issues, indicating that the challenges confronting Vietnamese educators may differ from those faced by their Western counterparts. As a result, this study is especially noteworthy since it is one of the first to look into the perceived challenges that faculty members confront when incorporating service-learning into higher education in Vietnam.

2.5. Conceptual framework

Within this study's scope, amongst six models of service-learning, discipline-based service-learning courses were adopted as the core topic of inquiry, owing to the collective experience of all participating EFL teachers in employing this pedagogical model. Figure 2 also depicts teachers' challenges relating to service-learning implementation, comprising time constraints (Eby, 1998; Ma & Lo, 2016), teaching materials/resources (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Ma & Lo, 2016), and assessment and techniques (Harrison et al., 2014; Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2008).

Figure 1

The Conceptual Framework for the Study



Note. The researcher's data analysis

3. Research method

3.1. Research design and instruments

Concerning research design, since service-learning is exceptionally varied and unpredictable, it is challenging to quantify precisely. Thus, this study employs the qualitative

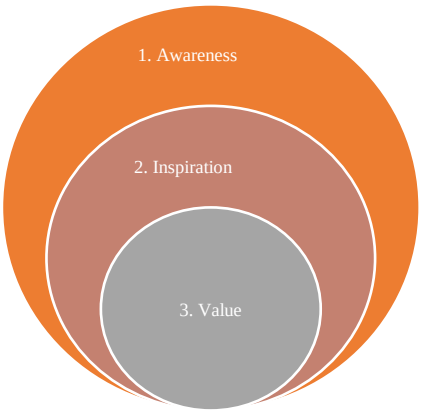
method, notably case studies, to investigate repeating themes across various situations. Theoretically, experiential learning theory is profoundly linked to teachers' challenges in service-learning. To illustrate, experiential learning theory, pioneered by theorists such as Kolb (1984), stresses the iterative learning process through real experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. Teachers may struggle with these practical applications of experiential learning principles in the classroom. Regarding research instruments, semi-structured interviews were employed, wherein researchers posed an ordered list of predefined yet open-ended questions to participants (Ayres, 2008). The interviews with teachers comprised three sections: (1) personal information, (2) background knowledge of service-learning, and (3) challenges during service-learning. The interview questions were tailored to align with the research objective, the participants' characteristics, and the study's context. More specifically, the background information about service-learning encompasses five items concerning the participants' understanding of the concept 'service-learning', the length of participation in the service-learning projects, responsibilities in the service-learning projects, requirements for lecturers in the service-learning projects, and their reflection on the service-learning projects. The key interview question addressed challenges the lecturers confronted when they took part in the service-learning projects. Based on this, some further questions about each challenge were raised.

3.2. Research site

This study was conducted at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which has a specialized Center of Service-Learning that offers academic and extracurricular programs. The center, which was established in 2018, focuses on three primary circles (Figure 2). The first circle is called *Awareness*, which concentrates on workshops and events to encourage service-learning among students. The second circle, *Inspiration*, mainly involves direct service-learning activities in which students participate in hands-on service projects at community sites. *Value* is the third circle, which refers to the incorporation of service-learning into the curriculum as its primary objective. In practice, the effective service-learning implementation occurs when there is a blend of the three circles.

Figure 2

Service-Learning Circles



Note. The researcher's data analysis

3.3. Participants and sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was utilized to choose teacher participants based on their willingness to share their experience and expertise. The researchers also sought credible insights into associated issues by focusing on lecturers who had adopted service-learning in

their classes. Faculty members in this study are from the Faculty of English, and they have integrated service-learning into their teaching methods and academic courses. These courses range from the project-based initiatives instructed by Ms. Nhi, Mr. Vinh, and Mr. Quang to the Ms. Quynh's service-learning-based course. It is noted that the participants were called under pseudonyms to remain confidential and anonymous. The faculty members and students were directly engaged with the community partner and addressed immediate needs or provided support, such as tutoring and mentoring children at the orphanage. In a project-based service, instructors and students collaborate on a specific project, such as translating articles or papers for community partners. The lecturers' backgrounds who participated in the interviews are presented in Table 1. Ms Quynh was in charge of the TESOL course, whereas the other teachers were responsible for the translation projects. All of them obtained a master's degree and have spent at least 06 years teaching English.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Teacher interviewee (pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Academic level	Years of teaching	Service-learning course/project
Ms. Quynh	Female	33	M.A.	11	TESOL
Ms. Nhi	Female	29	M.A.	6	Translation
Mr. Vinh	Male	51	M.A.	30	Translation
Mr. Quang	Male	33	M.A.	10	Translation

Note. Data from the semi-structured interviews. Data analysis result of the research

3.4. Data collection and analysis

Before conducting the interviews, a pilot study was done with teachers who shared similar interests as those participating in the final study to identify any problems or limitations in the interview format. Given the relevance of contextual awareness and language proficiency, the interview questions were translated and conducted in Vietnamese. During the interviews, notable quotes and prospective follow-up questions were recorded. Following the interviews, audio recordings were immediately transcribed to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information acquired. Participants were given pseudonyms to remain confidential. To validate the interviews, data extracts were distributed to participants to ensure consistency and precision in their responses. In terms of the analysis method, to mitigate the risk of interpretive bias, we adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. This method also brings an explicit framework for researchers to comply with, commencing with data familiarization and advancing through the phases of coding, theme emergence, and refinement. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reviewing the texts, taking notes, and cross-checking points with the participants. Second, after transcribing the interviews in Vietnamese, we generated preliminary codes using an Excel spreadsheet, organized the data, and applied concise codes. Third, they identified overarching themes/patterns and examined the relationships between codes. Then, the researchers identified themes and verified alignment with the data. Next, we refined the key themes and opted for relevant data extracts to construct a cohesive narrative. Finally, we conducted a comprehensive analysis, selected illustrative excerpts, and incorporated theoretical perspectives to address the research questions.

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Teachers' understanding of service-learning

Ms. Quynh's first exposure to the concept of service-learning occurred in 2019. It was not until the beginning of the 2024 semester when she was assigned to the service-learning field and began conducting associated research on service-learning, that she realized what it was. Besides, Mr. Vinh has been acquainted with the concept of service-learning for nearly two years. Mr. Quang encountered service-learning projects and courses on three occasions. His initial engagement with service-learning programs was confined to observation, and he only had two opportunities to teach a service-learning class. Ms. Nhi enrolled in two translation classes that included service-learning, each lasting five to seven weeks. Despite variances in the length of experience with service-learning, all four teachers demonstrated a sufficient understanding of service-learning, emphasizing academic material, feasible community-based activities, and students' personalized learning goals (Bringle & Clayton, 2012).

Service-learning is a type of learning in which students apply their classroom knowledge to serve the community. (Ms. Quynh)

Service-learning education entails applying acquired knowledge to benefit the community. Through such initiatives, students not only contribute to society but also enhance their learning. (Mr. Vinh)

Furthermore, all teachers acknowledged that, while service-learning is a stimulating teaching and learning model, it is still relatively new in Vietnam. This observation supports earlier research. Service-learning, according to Xing and Ma (2010), is an emerging approach to education in Asian countries. Likewise, in recent years, there has been a surge in community involvement efforts within universities across the country, marked by concepts somewhat new in the Vietnamese context, such as *"Kết nối cộng đồng"* (Connecting with the community) or *"Học tập cùng cộng đồng"* (Learning with the community) (Nguyen, 2021). Thus, the difficulties that teachers experience are unavoidable and require more investigation.

4.2. Teachers' challenges of service-learning implementation

4.2.1. Time constraints

All of the teachers acknowledged that while integrating real-world experiences into academic learning was undeniably advantageous, it also brought a myriad of pedagogical and practical hurdles, particularly within the constraints of a shortened timescale. In a typical scenario, a lesson spanned over a concise period of seven weeks. While this duration might have sufficed for covering theoretical and instructional content alone, the addition of service-learning components within the same timeframe posed significant challenges. The integration of service-learning within this limited timeframe inevitably led to a rushed atmosphere, making it arduous to maintain the quality of course output. Some teachers pointed out:

Everything seemed hurried. Students took tests and translated the translation work as part of their community service. Teachers monitored students' progress, evaluated assignments, and encouraged them to translate. (Mr. Quang)

The service-learning course has a restricted length. It poses obstacles for both students and teachers. (Ms. Nhi)

Moreover, the limited time of the subject matter left minimal room for extensive exploration and reflection. Mr. Vinh shared similar reservations, noting that the "course duration is merely seven weeks, which feels hurried. Within this timeframe, students must fulfill service-learning tasks while also completing mini-tests and midterms" (Mr. Vinh). Ms. Quynh also expressed their disappointment with the short period set for the service-learning project, given the quantity of labor required. Her challenges were worsened when she was tasked with personally visiting the service locations to observe and evaluate the student's progress. Given the five-week time frame, she was presented with the heavy tasks of project management, work delegation, and curriculum development. As Ziegert and McGoldrick (2008) put it, "Incorporating a new pedagogical technique involves time and preparation. Like any pedagogical technique that moves beyond lecture, much of time investment occurs at the front end and is incurred by the faculty …" (p. 52). Hou's (2010) study also identifies classroom-level challenges to service-learning, such as time limits for coordinating experiences. Service-learning frequently includes practical experiences, such as volunteering in community groups, as well as cooperative meaning-making and knowledge creation, all of which take a major time investment. This partly explains that teacher participants can find it difficult to give the experience learning process their all.

4.2.2. Lack of teaching resources

The teachers were adamant that service-learning was about more than just academics; it was also about instilling compassion and empathy in students. Still, as the initiative developed, it became clear that their kindness was costing them dearly. Ms. Quynh disclosed:

Both my students and I encountered a considerable expenditure associated with color printing, and laminating covers for a diverse array of instructional aids, alongside procuring toys and color boxes to facilitate language acquisition among the shelter's children. However, this undertaking necessitated a financial commitment. (Ms. Quynh)

She further articulated that for children to effectively acquire foreign language skills and excel in learning, it was imperative to provide them with essential tools such as color kits and flashcards. However, she also emphasized the ongoing difficulty she encountered in the scenario of instructing further courses that incorporated service-learning, where high costs for educational materials became routine. The absence of analogous concerns with Mr. Vinh and Mr. Quang could be attributed to variances in their service-learning approaches. Mr. Vinh and Mr. Quang's service-learning activities were limited to classroom settings, so they likely had better control over the availability and appropriateness of educational instruments, lowering potential problems. Ngai and Chan (2019) share the same perspective that experiential learning, such as service-learning, necessitates more effort and resources than traditional classroom-based learning methods. This poses challenges at both the individual and departmental levels. As Nguyen (2021) points out, the absence of support or resources for service-learning programs may stem from administrators' limited awareness or institutional constraints. The lack of defined legislation and regulatory systems guiding service-learning in Vietnam may lead to a lack of dedicated resources and support for its implementation. Without explicit demands or incentives from educational authorities, institutions might prioritize other academic endeavors above service-learning, resulting in limited resources.

4.2.3. Escalation of teaching workload

Regarding the workload, Mr. Vinh noted, "I organized the students into groups, each assigned a portion of the partner's 40-page translation, typically around five pages per group. Considerable time and effort were needed as I had to revise each of the forty pages of the

translation" (Mr. Vinh). Given the constraints of midterms, student mini-tests, and translation assignments, classes were condensed to approximately seven weeks, necessitating a significant increase in workload for him. While Mr. Vinh's integrated session predominantly occurred within the confines of the classroom, where students were tasked with translating articles for community partners, Ms. Quynh's service-learning endeavor necessitated her and her students to engage directly with the community onsite. Working mostly independently, she shouldered a significant workload, including reviewing and providing feedback on the work of nine students and thirty-six lesson plans. She expressed these concerns chronologically:

First, I prioritize addressing personal matters at home. Then, I research the needs of the children and community partners at the orphanage. Next, I select curriculum resources, craft lesson plans, and assign student roles. I have to review student work, provide feedback, and encourage timely completion. I also facilitate meetings between students and community partners to implement lessons at the orphanage. (Ms. Quynh)

According to Shek and Chan's (2013) findings, mandatory service-learning might increase stress and workload for students and teachers. In the same way, as service-learning gains increasing traction, academic staff are compelled to either develop a new course or adapt existing ones to integrate service-learning components, all while managing their already demanding workloads (Xu & Chan, 2022). According to experiential learning theory, educational experiences require the integration of academic knowledge and practical application. Teachers who employ service-learning strive to correlate classroom learning with actual-life scenarios to help students construct deeper knowledge and skills. Additional efforts may be required in curriculum creation, lesson planning, and assessment to verify that theoretical concepts and practical activities are linked. As a result, this adds to faculty members' already heavy workloads, particularly those who are new to service-learning. In this regard, assessment is included as part of teaching practice issues that may emerge from the teaching workload rather than a hindrance per se to the participants, as claimed by some researchers (Harrison et al., 2014; Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2008).

4.2.4. Students' lack of commitment

Ms. Quynh had previously raised a concern: "Some individuals exhibit a lack of diligence in their studies and fail to heed the instructions provided by the lecturer. The advancement of the project suffered due to inadequate planning and failure to adhere to deadlines" (Ms. Quynh). When questioned about the occurrence of situations where students lack commitment, other teachers also unequivocally affirmed. Despite exerting their utmost effort to motivate the students, a number of them seemed unwilling to fully engage in the translation projects. Their apparent lack of enthusiasm made the teachers frustrated:

Some students did not demonstrate the same level of dedication. Some students engaged in translation solely to earn bonus points. They resorted to Google Translate, resulting in translations of subpar quality. (Mr. Vinh)

There's just so much to juggle. If students were more attentive, I could review the translation content more efficiently, resulting in much better outcomes. (Mr. Quang)

I can only communicate with students through text messages and cannot oversee them directly. This could cause them to neglect communications and deadlines, causing delays and jeopardizing the project's success. (Ms. Nhi)

In Darby and Newman's (2014) study, faculty members' unhappiness with students' lack of dedication to the course caused them to view the academic service-learning experience

as challenging rather than rewarding. Considering his extensive expertise in service-learning, Eby (1998) contends that the academic calendar, sporting events, class schedules, transportation alternatives, and students' different personal responsibilities all have a significant impact on their dedication. Thus, these limits may impede student's capacity to work effectively with others, particularly teachers. The lack of student interest in service-learning can be attributed to the fact that many Vietnamese higher education institutions have yet to implement service-learning as an alternative to traditional education. As a result, students regard it as superfluous and even an addition to their academic interests. Although this finding does not arise from the teachers, it is an issue that teachers need to take into consideration in reality.

5. Conclusions & recommendations

The lecturer participants' dedication to the service-learning model was unmistakable. They were uninformed of the myriad challenges that would lie ahead, though. Initially, all teachers agreed that one of the key concerns was the students' lack of commitment. This problem expressed itself in a variety of ways, such as when numerous students failed to stick to requirements and their planning was poor. One implication is that teachers should establish clear objectives and achievable goals from the start. This can help students realize the significance of their commitments and cultivate a sense of responsibility for service-learning. Also, Kolb (1984) characterizes learning as a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active inquiry. Educators can make learning more relevant and meaningful for students by encouraging them to reflect on it. It can connect their service experiences to larger theoretical ideas through abstract conceptualization. In other words, this integration of theory and practice can strengthen the relevance of the learning experience for students, motivating them to remain motivated and involved throughout the service-learning courses.

The second issue was the workload that faculty members must undertake when teaching service-learning courses. The heavy labor of lecturing, material creation, assignment marking, and service-learning tasks sometimes left faculty members feeling overburdened. Attending seminars on service-learning in higher education can assist educators manage workload pressure by offering them further details about productive evaluation methodologies, realistic guidance, and instructional planning methods for incorporating service-learning into their curriculum. This allows them to improve their competence and confidence in implementing service-learning, reducing their teaching workload effectively. Besides, it is vital to establish a peer mentoring program in which experienced instructors advise rookie service-learning course instructors. Mentors can offer advice, strategies, and assistance based on their personal experiences. Furthermore, faculty members from different disciplines who teach service-learning courses should work together. This interdisciplinary approach can provide faculty members with diverse solutions while decreasing workload pressure.

Thirdly, teachers of service-learning courses faced unique difficulties due to a lack of resources (e.g., purchasing instructional materials), which made the courses difficult to implement and less productive. Institutions should prioritize devoting adequate resources expressly for service-learning courses. This may entail budgeting for instructional materials and professional development opportunities for faculty. Furthermore, the effectiveness of service-learning courses needs to be examined regularly. Feedback from all stakeholders, such as students, faculty members, and community partners should be used to guide resource allocation and course improvement activities.

Last but not least, time constraints, such as the short-term nature of service-learning limited the teacher's capacity to assist and supervise students during the service-learning process. Service-learning projects should have clearly defined scopes that correspond to the duration of the course. The academic calendar, key milestones, deadlines, and other potential disruptions should all be considered when organizing service-learning activities to ensure that the timeframe is achievable and within reach. Students' reflections should also be used to make modifications to the project scope, timing, or activities that will improve learning outcomes and ensure project success.

Although this study offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the small number of participants in this qualitative study has the potential to limit the range of opinions represented in the data. Future quantitative surveys could offer a wider sample of participants to acquire numerical data on the barriers to service-learning. Second, due to time constraints, this study only included teacher participants. Future research can provide an expanded understanding of the challenges and impacts of service-learning programs by incorporating perspectives from a wider spectrum of stakeholders, such as administrators, students, or community partners.

SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

The manuscript clearly identifies a research gap; the manuscript opens new directions for further research; the manuscript extends or refines existing theories; the manuscript provides new datasets or empirical evidence; the manuscript offers policy/managerial/technological implications.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CRediT: **Huong Thi Thu Tran**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft; **Tham My Duong**: Reviewing & Editing, Formal Analysis, Supervision, Manuscript Submission; **Anh Truc Nguyen**: Writing - Review, Validation, Visualization, Investigation; **Cuong Quoc Vo**: Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Writing Specific Sections.

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NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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