Virtual Service-Learning in Less Commonly Taught Languages:
Promoting Global Citizenship and Social Responsibility

Kusum Knapczyk
Duke University

Abstract

This paper examines the use of virtual service-learning tools to foster global citizenship and social responsibility in the context of Less Commonly Taught Languages. As the world becomes more interconnected, service-learning offers a paradigm to help students achieve language learning goals and become socially responsible global citizens. The use of virtual service-learning tools has become particularly important due to the limited access to resources such as local community partners, funds to travel to and from the community partners, and time to spend traveling. With virtual service-learning, students use their language skills in real-life situations and make use of the resources available to them. Moreover, virtual service-learning may offer fewer distractions and more reliable partners.

This paper is based on my own experiences in incorporating service-learning in Hindi language courses; it offers examples and suggestions for educators who seek to incorporate virtual service-learning into their curricula. Through service-learning projects like creating literature and digital solutions, students come to appreciate their role as global citizens. They also gain important language skills, while enhancing their career opportunities and cultural understanding.

Introduction

When I ask my students their reasons for learning Hindi, they often respond by expressing a desire to gain language proficiency in order to hold conversations in the language. As proficiency in speaking is a primary objective for most language learners, it is important for a course to provide ample opportunities to practice in real-life contexts and with a real purpose. This goal led me to consider introducing a Hindi service-learning program, but I had trouble finding a suitable group from the Hindi-speaking community near my campus. Around the time that the Covid-19 pandemic started, I found a community partner in India who was able to join us virtually. This paper shares how virtual service learning helps students connect language learning to real life. I have observed students using the language with community partners, solving problems together, and discovering new cultural ideas. I also discuss how this method works well online, making global learning easier for teachers of Less Commonly Taught Languages with few local resources.

It may be helpful to define what are Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) and to describe the unique issues that teachers of these languages encounter. According to Michigan State University's National LCTL Resource Center, "LCTLs are anything other than English and the commonly taught world languages of French, German, and Spanish" (n.d.).[1] As a group, LCTLs face similar challenges; as a recent article states, low enrollment in LCTLs programs often results in just one instructor and irregular course offerings, making it hard to sustain advanced-level classes. This not only limits student progress but also places undue pressure on instructors (Heidrich, Kraemer, & Giupponi, 2024, p. 2). Given these challenges, virtual service-learning has clear benefits because this approach can help LCTLs to survive even in the absence of local community partners and insufficient funding from institutions.

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[1] A similar definition is accepted by the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL) (n.d.).

The importance of virtual learning derives from the fact that "digital tools were often designed to explicitly facilitate multimodal collaboration, and, with a wider variety of humans and human stories than may be found within the four walls of the typical classroom" (Guillén., Sawin, & Avineri, 2020, p.1). To provide a broader learning experience, virtual learning can be as useful as in-person service-learning. The definition given above emphasizes how digital platforms facilitate connections between people from different backgrounds, cultures, and geographical locations, promoting diversity and inclusivity beyond traditional classrooms. This is particularly important in the case of teaching LCTLs where instructors can readily enhance their teaching through virtual means despite limited resources.

This paper has four main sections: (1) an overview of definitions of service-learning and its components, (2) examples of service-learning in the field of Less Commonly Taught Languages and their potential impact on communities,

(3) detailed examples of how to implement a virtual service-learning program including students' reflection, and lastly (4) a discussion of the potential challenges that may be encountered and strategies to overcome them.

1. Service-learning and its components

Service-learning has benefits for both students and the community: it helps students develop skills and gain a better understanding of people and society, making them more responsible global citizens. Service-learning fosters a sense of social responsibility, encouraging them to actively contribute to making the community a fair and equitable place for all. The concept of social responsibility involves appreciating that resources should be shared equitably, ensuring that everyone can grow and thrive. Students come to understand that the fair distribution of resources is a key component of a healthy, inclusive society.

Service-learning also promotes global citizenship. According to UNESCO, "Global citizenship involves recognizing and

practicing the rights and duties associated with being part of the global community. It focuses on understanding and addressing worldwide issues like human rights and environmental sustainability, and it cultivates respect for diversity and a commitment to creating a more equitable world" (UNESCO, 2025). In my opinion, UNESCO's definition should also include acting responsibly in their own local space. The idea of global citizenship sometimes feels too broad, so it can help to connect it with everyday actions that show care and respect for others in the local community.

1.1. Definitions of Service-learning

Although most agree that social responsibility and global citizenship are key components of service-learning, there are differences in how the concept is defined more specifically. In *Community-Based Language Learning* (2019), Clifford and Reisinger offer a comprehensive discussion about the terminology used by academic institutions for their community engagement and service-learning programs. They propose that the term 'service' in 'service-learning' may lead

to imbalanced relationships between students, faculty, and communities, which can perpetuate stereotypes or inequalities; for this reason, students may perceive themselves as 'working for' instead of 'working with' the community. As a result, alternative terminologies like community-based teaching or civic engagement have gained popularity. In this way, community-based learning becomes a broad term that encompasses activities that engage students with their communities and is often used interchangeably with service-learning.

Clifford and Reisinger further expand on the concept of community-based learning, which "encompasses service-oriented interactions with the community, such as service learning, as well as other solidarity-building practices that transform worldviews, highlight social issues, co-create knowledge, and foster authentic relationships based on connection" (p. 15). Service-learning is more than just helping others or doing something that feels good; it is about learning through real experiences in the community. It helps students

think about fairness, relationships, and social change. Students use what they learn in class to understand problems in society and try to make a difference. It also helps them see how language, power, and society are connected. But in the United States, many schools now treat service-learning as a way to improve college applications or job chances. Because of this, service-learning often becomes more about counting hours and building resumes than about helping others or learning (Clifford and Reisinger, p. 13-14). In my opinion, it is still worth introducing service-learning to students. Although the impact may not be clear right away, it plants a seed of awareness. Later in life, students may remember these experiences and make changes because they were exposed to these ideas earlier in life.

Kaye offers an alternative definition of service-learning, stating that it involves "a teaching method where guided or classroom learning is deepened through service to others in a process that provides structured time

for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of the skills and knowledge acquired" (Kaye, 2004, p. 7). Kaye's definition focuses on the process of service-learning, including structured time for reflection and demonstration of the acquired skills and knowledge.

A third definition of service-learning by Prentice and Robinson (2010) places greater emphasis on aspects of critical reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility. They propose that service-learning is "combining community service with academic instruction, focusing on critical reflective thinking and personal and civic responsibility" (p. 1). Similarly, Berman (2006) states that, "Service-learning blends academic goals with real community service, helping students apply course content while developing empathy and civic responsibility. By engaging directly with communities, students grow both intellectually and ethically" (p. xxi). Both definitions highlight the value of service learning in connecting academic study with real-world engagement. Service learning is valuable because it connects classroom

learning with real community needs. I agree with Prentice and

Robinson that reflection and responsibility are key. Without

thinking deeply about their role, students may miss the real

purpose of service. The focus should not be merely on tasks,

but on growing as thoughtful and responsible members of

society.

In *Service-Learning: Enhancing Inclusive Education*, the

authors state that "Community service involves students

helping individuals or groups through tasks like meal

preparation, fundraising, or office work. Service learning

combines this with academic goals, creating a shared benefit

for both students and the community" (Lavery, Chambers, &

Cain, 2017, p. 7). I agree with this view, and authors like Kaye

also support such activities. I propose that language

service-learning is most effective when students reflect on

their experiences, especially when they encounter different

cultures and challenges. This reflection helps them grow into

thoughtful global learners. Without it, service can feel like just another task, missing its deeper purpose.

All these definitions share a general concept of service-learning, where students engage in community service as part of their academic learning process. Moreover, these definitions highlight the transformative potential of service-learning in fostering both academic and personal growth. Most definitions of service-learning also share the components of solidarity-building, achieving mutual benefit, transforming perspectives, forming authentic relationships, engaging in critical reflection, and upholding civic duties.

Additionally, individuals involved in these programs are expected to regularly provide critical reflections to enhance the quality of their service, learning, and comprehension. Kaye proposes the sequence of service-learning can be described as follows: planning, implementation, evaluation, and showcasing (Kaye, 2004, p. 10). In my opinion, planning through backward design is essential, as it allows instructors to consider the entire

semester, set clear goals for the class, and determine the tasks or actions needed to achieve those goals.

1.2. Service-learning and Language Education

Turning to language education, the implementation of service-learning remains a relatively new approach with much to explore. At its core, service-learning involves students engaging meaningfully with community groups outside the classroom for a set number of hours during the term. Unlike volunteering, it is integrated into the curriculum and aims to enhance academic learning while fostering cultural understanding, civic responsibility, and problem-solving skills. Participation may be local or global, in person or virtual, but it must be mutually beneficial for both students and community partners.

In many service-learning programs, students are expected to work fifteen to twenty hours with community partners. But in beginner or intermediate language classes, this can be difficult. Students often find it hard to speak in the target language for more than fifteen minutes. Students

can create helpful materials like grammar guides, cultural lessons, or conversation practice based on the partner's needs. The type of course and the kind of partner shape the experience. Service-learning in a language class is different from other subjects. For example, my work with an NGO over four years was very different from working with a university group in Delhi. The age, background, and goals of each group changed the direction of the program. One model does not work for all.

For language courses, two to three meetings with community partners may be sufficient. If partners are not compensated, it is important to respect their time and effort. Clear communication about expectations and mutual benefits is essential to ensure a respectful and collaborative experience. Language-focused service-learning presents unique challenges. Without proper orientation, community partners may unintentionally take on the role of instructors, correcting students and causing hesitation or anxiety. To avoid this, partners should be informed about students'

language proficiency and encouraged to be supportive rather than evaluative. Empathy and understanding are key to building trust and confidence.

Service-learning should be adapted to the subject and proficiency level. Long-term partnerships with community organizations can strengthen the program's impact and sustainability. When aligned with community needs, such as offering English lessons, students can contribute meaningfully while reinforcing their own learning. As Baker (2019, p. 2) notes, "community-based service-learning (CBSL) enhances language proficiency, intercultural competence, and civic engagement. She also highlights its potential to revitalize language programs, especially in response to declining enrollments in language majors." Lastly, students must approach service-learning with humility and respect. Community partners are not passive recipients but equal collaborators. A successful program is built on empathy, mutual benefit, and shared learning.

2. Examples of Service-learning in the field of Less Commonly Taught Languages and their potential impact on communities

A common piece of wisdom states that it is more effective to

gain knowledge by analyzing and studying the

accomplishments and failures of others than by one's own

trial and error. For this reason, this section offers an

examination of a few service-learning cases in the field of

Less Commonly Taught Languages based on literature review

and interviews with the instructors.

2.1. Creation of an Anti-Plastic Poster by an Undergraduate Hindi Class through virtual service-learning

Level & Institution- Undergraduate Elementary Hindi,

Rice University

 Service-learning Approach Themes

Save Ecosystem, Reduce Plastic Footprint, Sustainable

Living, Cultivate Positive Daily Routines.

Expanding the Reach: Interdisciplinary Connections:

> ➢ Hindi Language: Hindi Language poster

> ➢ Art: Design poster campaign

➢ Science: Study waste reduction

➢ Theater: Acting in the video

➢ Technology: computer technology for virtual conversation, design and make flyers of anti-plastic tips for the community.

As part of a community-engaged initiative at Rice University, undergraduate Hindi students collaborated with the Delhi-based Non-Profit Organization "Yuva Unstoppable" (Shilcutt 2019). The goal, as set out by instructor Divya Chaudhry, was to develop interactional and intercultural Hindi skills among the students through this partnership. To effectively communicate with their community partners, students from Rice spoke Hindi as part of the community-engaged program. This facilitated a cultural exchange and fostered mutual understanding, leading to the incorporation of the NGO's campaign into the students' final project, which comprised a poster and a video skit campaign.

The NGO representatives utilized the video campaign, which was broadcasted in government-run schools across India.

Community partners were impressed with the students' language skills and eagerness to learn and requested them to design an anti-plastic campaign poster for their own initiative. Drawing on their Hindi proficiency, the students produced a short skit and video, utilizing their technology and theater skills. They also used their language and computer skills to create posters on sustainable living, which was presented in Yuva schools to educate Indian students on the harmful effects of plastics. The collaboration proved to be beneficial for both the community partners 'Yuva Unstoppable' and students, as the campaign materials had a real-world impact (Shilcutt, 2019, p.1).

This community-engaged program appeared to have been very effective as both sides met multiple times virtually using Google Hangout and Skype and exchanged videos in a video pen pal style. They engaged in dialogue and learned about each other's lives and environments. Students at Rice

utilized the Hindi they had learned during the semester to record videos depicting everyday life and activities such as playing cricket, studying, and cooking. Delhi students felt at ease conversing with university students due to these videos. They found it very comfortable that the students were conversing in Hindi and creating videos to raise awareness about plastic. They had never interacted with people outside their school and were unaware of college life in America. Engaging in discussions about these new topics was a unique experience for them.

The poster for the campaign made by Rice students was inspired by the ideal boy poster. The ideal boy posters focused on instilling "good" habits and encouraging children to do good. For instance, one example highlighted waking early to greet parents and study. In contrast, the students' plastic campaign poster depicted ideal children using steel lunch boxes and jute bags instead of plastic bags and promoting inclusivity by using "children" instead of "boy."

This virtual community engagement program connects language and culture to real-life experiences, allowing students to witness the practical use of the Hindi language by solving a problem and benefitting each other.

How one can adapt this model:
To adapt this model, instructors can start by identifying potential community partners with aligned interests, such as environmental initiatives, art focus, health, and wellness focus. They can then establish regular virtual meetings or dialogues between students and community members to foster mutual understanding and collaboration. From the meetings, students can find ways to contribute to their community partners' mission such as creating digital campaign materials, organizing events, or conducting advocacy work related to environmental issues. Instructors can incorporate these activities into their curriculum to provide students with hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for real-world application of knowledge.

2.2. The Memory Project: A Tool for Improving Communication and Comprehension in Mandarin through videos

Level & Institution- Undergraduate Advanced Chinese,

Duke University

Service-learning Approach: Topics

Translation history, rural life, and great famine, developing

intergenerational relationships.

Expanding the Reach: Interdisciplinary Connections

➢ Language: Mandarin to English Translation

➢ Science: Study pandemic

➢ History: Study famine history in China

➢ Technology: computer technology for accessing

authentic real-life audio and video archival footage

This third-year Chinese course at Duke University is designed to improve students' Chinese communication and comprehension abilities via translation and interpretation (Duke University Libraries 2016). One of the projects

assigned to the students is to translate the Folk Memory Project, a collection of interviews in which native Chinese speakers discuss their experiences of famine between 1958 and 1961. These young filmmakers in the project talk to people who lived through the Great Famine in rural China.

The students' success in this endeavor demonstrates how to sustain long-term efforts in collective social and artistic movements, providing valuable lessons about people living in China. Through the process of analyzing and translating the interviews, students gain insights into the types of food that interviewees consumed during the famine, as well as the various methods of survival employed during that time, along with their personal histories, lives, routines, and culture. In addition, students have the opportunity to listen to and interpret diverse dialects, slang, and speaking styles across different age groups. This project teaches students about China's history, and it helps others understand how historical events affected people's lives. This practice not only enhances students' language competence and cultural proficiency, but it

also benefits the community by preserving translations of archival materials in the university library for future reference (Duke University Libraries, 2016). This project is well-suited for programs with limited resources. Students and community partners are benefiting from it. Students are learning to understand the language in context. However, a missing element is direct conversation with the partners.

How one can adapt this model:
To adapt this model, instructors can involve translating educational materials such as school notices, pamphlets, legal documents, health information, as well as local community organization materials such as newsletters, volunteer opportunities, announcements. (historical documents) This model of community service lacks live conversation between students and community partners, meaning students cannot ask their partners questions. However, it remains useful for students as they learn the language, culture, and history while the community benefits from having their history preserved in the native language for future generations to read.

2.3. Exploring the Experiences of Arabic-Speaking Refugees through online Interviews

Level & Institution- Undergraduate Advanced Arabic, Duke University

Service-learning Approach Themes

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Refugees Life

Expanding the Reach: Interdisciplinary Connections

➢ Arabic language and culture: Discover the language through immigrant narratives and expressions.

➢ Social studies: Interview immigrants of various age groups for insight into their experiences.

➢ English language: Develop lessons on essential phrases, American history, and more.

➢ Science: Explore folk customs and traditional home remedies for health brought by immigrants from their native lands.

In this course in Arabic Culture at Duke University, students collaborate with refugees utilizing 'NaTakallam,' an online

platform that helps refugees and displaced people find jobs online as teachers, tutors, translators, and cultural exchange partners, regardless of their location and legal status (NaTakallam, n.d.). Through NaTakallam, Duke students collaborate with these community partners on oral history projects, conducting interviews with refugees and transcribing their conversations verbatim.

These community partners are compensated for their services through the website. Students meet with their community partners and then reflect on their experience and use their English proficiency to assist their partners in communicating their struggles and navigating life in America. For example, Lara, a Palestinian-Armenian filmmaker from Jerusalem, shares her personal story of growing up in a family with both Christian and Muslim traditions. She talks about celebrating holidays from both religions, the challenges of mixed backgrounds, and her hope for peace and unity in Palestine (Duke University, 2020). This collaboration gives

mutual benefit to both sides: students gain practical experience in conducting interviews and refugees share their real-life stories and overcome language barriers (Duke University, n.d.). In my opinion, this is a valuable service-learning project that connects well with the course materials. It offers mutual benefits, helping students gain deep insights into the history, politics, and culture of the country, while also allowing them to practice the language in a meaningful way they will never forget.

How one can adapt this model:
To adapt this model, instructors can establish partnerships with online platforms that are readily available for aiding language speaking, as well as those that prioritize inclusion and social purpose. Instructors can design courses focusing on topics such as oral history projects, gender, and human rights depending upon the mission of the online platform's community. Students can be involved in interviews and transcribing conversations, teaching the partners new skills, giving solutions to their queries among other activities. In this

kind of communication, students and community partners both acquire practical knowledge and experience.

Students also gain an understanding of real-world issues and use their English skills to assist their partners in communicating their struggles and navigating life in America, providing valuable support, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Telling their own stories empowers refugees because their voice is heard, and they can connect with others in their new community. As in the example of the Chinese language Memory Project, these Arabic stories are recorded, translated, and preserved by partner students, ensuring that they are not forgotten. Overall, this community-engaged initiative has the potential to create positive and lasting impacts for both students and refugees involved.

The three examples from Less Commonly Taught Languages outlined above illustrate that meaningful community-engaged and service-learning programs can have a positive impact on all participants. By providing students

with real-world experiences, service-learning not only
improves their academic performance but also motivates
them to engage with language learning and enhance their
understanding of course materials. For example, when
learning Arabic through service-learning, students may find it
more valuable to understand the community's needs and
assist refugees in resettling, which in turn can boost their
confidence and instill a sense of social responsibility. As the
saying goes, "Do good for others and good will come back to
you." In this way, service-learning opportunities not only
benefit the community partners but also help students
develop professional skills and prepare for future
employment.

3. The Hindi Virtual Service-learning Program at Duke University

In my Hindi language courses at Duke University, my
objective is not solely to develop my students' proficiency in
speaking the language, but also to expose them to various
communities to gain a better understanding of global issues
and encourage them to advocate for justice and humanity.

Therefore, a significant aim of my courses is to foster global and local connections among students through service-learning and community-engaged programs that utilize innovative pedagogical tools in the field of LCTLs. My courses are officially designated as Duke service-learning and community-engaged courses, wherein students are required to participate in a minimum of twenty hours of service-learning by engaging with community partners. Service is an integral aspect of the course curriculum, and both the students and community partners regularly reflect on the impact of their service.

To establish the service-learning program for Hindi, I initiated a community partnership with Delhi Young Artist Forum (DYAF), which primarily consists of young women in high school and college. The DYAF strives to improve the education, health, and overall well-being of underprivileged children and teenagers residing in Delhi slums and offers training to teenagers to become self-sufficient and

independent. To enable Duke Hindi students to comprehend the mission and activities of the DYAF, at the start of term I lead lessons on topics related to equality and inclusivity, such as gender inequality, dowry, healthcare, climate change, the education system, and the caste system. Such topics are studied beforehand in class so that students can understand the issues when they are discussed with their language partners. Throughout the semester, all Hindi language classes engage with the DYAF in virtual meetings multiple times via Zoom. Students watch videos sent by the DYAF representatives about themselves with basic information. Students have a few questions for community partners based on the video and the NGO newsletter.

The image below depicts a page from their newsletter, detailing their involvement in holding 16 meetings addressing domestic violence against women. Women and girls shared their personal experiences with violence, while various organizations and educators, and friends offered solutions to

these challenges. The posters featured in this image highlight

the topics discussed during these meetings.

This service-learning program follows a timeline that

starts with my reaching out to community partners and

discussing their upcoming events and availability before the semester begins. I also begin designing my curriculum themes based on the activities of the community partners. The months of August, September, and October are dedicated to preparation and implementation, during which my students and I review the topics of curriculum, examine the DYAF's newsletter and pictures, and engage in mock practice sessions to brainstorm potential solutions to the community partners' problems. I also provide guidance to my students and the community partners on the dos and don'ts of the meetings and share a detailed schedule or program for the meeting day to avoid any confusion. Following these meetings, the community partners and students assessed our progress and composed a reflection. At the conclusion of the semester, my students present their findings through posters, blogs, and e-books. Here is a sample timeline I use:

Figure 1. A Model Service-Learning Timeline

June/July/August Pre-semester Planning	September Implementation	October Implementation	November Reflection	December Showcasing
Instructor plans the whole semester's activities with community partners.	Topic discussion with students to prepare for the meeting.	Students watch community members' introduction videos.	Community partners meetings happen on multiple occasions.	Students service-learning reflection via blog/articles.
Instructor integrates service-learning activities into the curriculum.	Students read the community partners' newsletter.	Students brainstorm solutions for community partners' issues.	Students give verbal & written reflections.	Students service-learning reflection via posters.
Select the community partners participating throughout the semester.	Students review pictures and activities.	Students mock practice Q&A with their peers.	Community partners give verbal & written reflections.	Students service-learning reflection via E-book.
The instructor and community partners decide on all meeting dates.	Students learn vocabulary & phrases related to the topics.	Detailed meeting schedule given to the students.	The instructor reflects and takes notes for improvement in the next meeting.	Students service-learning reflection via literature.

Here are some examples of service-learning experiences which happened in separate meetings with the community partners at Duke.

3.1. Digital Solutions for Social Change

In my Elementary Hindi course, students were able to use their knowledge of the technology tool "Canva" to assist the Delhi Young Artist Forum (DYAF) in problem-solving, which led to an impactful service-learning project. This

lesson began with a unit on "school and classroom." Initially,

my students were introduced to vocabulary and grammar

related to this theme, then they collected information about

Indian classes using pictures and news media. I presented

them with several images from government schools where

students were seated on the floor, accompanied by a lone

teacher managing a large class. The classrooms were

overcrowded, with one teacher responsible for many students.

The students' school uniforms were worn and torn, with

some wearing shoes while others wore slippers. During our

discussions, I asked students questions such as, "Is this school

similar to their schools?" and "Does this indicate a social

class?" They discovered that government schools in India are

typically attended by poor students who cannot afford a

private school.

Through this activity, students used ACTFL's 5 Cs to

connect language learning with real-life experiences. They

used Hindi in context to talk with people in the community.

They became part of a wider language community and

learned about different values and ways of thinking. They also compared their own experiences with those from Hindi language and culture.

I then began the service-learning component by connecting the topic of school and classroom to the real-world issues faced by the community partners. Through pictures and news media, my students learned about Indian students' education and how government schools are typically attended by underprivileged students. Consequently, my students gained insights into the challenges that our community partners face as students in government schools. To deepen their understanding of these challenges, I shared with them the DYAF's newsletter, which outlined an educational campaign to bring back students who had lost motivation and fallen behind in their studies. Students were also introduced to the posters created by the DYAF to motivate the community.

Inspired by these efforts, my students suggested using the "Canva" tool to create posters in Hindi with slogans to support the campaign. They made posters featuring encouraging quotes about staying in school, utilizing iconic cartoon characters. The posters were well-received and used widely in the DYAF's campaigns in their community. One student reflected on the project, expressing appreciation for how it allowed them to explore different issues plaguing India and make a meaningful impact. In this way students made connections by linking language learning with technology.

To summarize, my students were able to learn about the challenges faced by students and administrators within the Indian education system and use their skills to make a meaningful contribution to the community. This experience allowed them to apply their knowledge of Hindi in a real-world context and utilize their computer skills to tackle the problem at hand. As a result, both the community partners and the students benefited from this collaborative effort.

3.2. Learning Through Literature

As part of our partnerships, students and community members were involved in virtual exchanges that incorporated literature written in Hindi. DYAF writes empowering poems for their community, which inspired my students to create their own poems in class. As part of a class project, my intermediate students created two poems each and shared their best poem with the community partners. One student's poem focused on her future aspirations as a mother, such as inspiring kindness towards other humans and treating people with equality and love.

During a meeting, my students and community partners exchanged their poems, and the partners were impressed with their depth of meaning. They requested to use the poems in their next newsletter alongside the work of other Indian poets. This experience allowed my students to create literature written in Hindi that could be published in the real world beyond the classroom. One student reflected on the session, expressing pride in their language learning

progress and appreciation for the opportunity to express themselves through writing. The community partners also shared insights on poetry and story writing and life in India, expanding the students' understanding of the world. This kind of literature exchange can benefit any service-learning language program where students create literature written in the target language. This exchange benefits both parties: students gain recognition and validation for their literary creations, while community partners receive quality content for their newsletter.

3.3. Unlocking Job Opportunities Through Service-Learning

In my Intermediate Hindi class, I focused on gender inequality and used various Hindi sources such as textbooks, newspapers, and magazines to broaden my students' perspectives. They delved into different stories and situations related to equity and inclusivity and examined these issues from various contexts. During a meeting with our DYAF partners, we discussed a variety of topics related to women

empowerment. They said that to empower women, they need to gain access to jobs, education, and English language skills.

In response, my Hindi students created an e-book titled "English for Life" to teach English to the DYAF students. The lessons included American slang, casual greetings, games, and idioms. My students also taught the DYAF students knock-knock jokes and had them repeat them back and forth to each other. It was an enjoyable experience for both sides, and by the end, the girls from the DYAF were using English words to communicate with us. They mentioned after the meeting that they are learning something new from Duke students in each meeting. Some even jot down every new word they hear in their notebooks, intending to use them again in the following session. This was truly remarkable and effective for them. Additionally, some expressed interest in learning useful phrases, while others were keen on picking up slang commonly used by the US students in their daily lives.

In future semesters, my students plan to cover women's rights and issues in these English lessons. Students expressed that they enjoyed these real-world experiences and interactions with the topics that we explore in the classroom. During this process, my students created a few English lessons to teach Hindi-speaking students basic phrases. They spent time preparing and practicing their English lessons and made sure to explain everything in Hindi, ensuring that the service they provided was mutually beneficial for both parties.

Improving Through Reflection in service-learning
Reflection is a key part of service learning and plays an important role in strengthening the program. The article *Research on and Through Reflection in International Service Learning* explains that reflection often builds on John Dewey's idea of thinking deeply about experience to create meaningful learning and action. Later scholars, such as Kiely, suggest that reflection should also include emotional and physical responses, not just structured thinking. This broader view helps students grow in different ways through their service

experiences (Camus, Ngai, Kwan, & Wong, 2021, p. 286). Reflection is a crucial component in my approach to enhancing the service-learning experience for both my students and community partners. By critically analyzing their reflections on the service, I can identify areas where I can refine and elevate my own performance. For this purpose, I drew inspiration for my reflection questions from Cathryn Kaye's work. (Kaye, 2004, p. 44-48). Verbal reflections take place primarily after meetings with students and community partners, while written reflections are completed by students through a Google doc.

My community partners are unable to spare time for writing reflections, and they feel hesitant about it, but they are comfortable with sharing their thoughts and feedback with us through verbal communication. I provide my students with a set of questions (given below one example) to serve as a reference for writing a paragraph based on those guidelines.

Question 1: How did you like the meeting with the Delhi Young Artist Forum?

Question 2: What challenges did you face during the talk?

Question 3: Is there anything else I can do to help you prepare? Do you have any suggestions for me?

Question 4: What was your "Aha!" moment?

Question 5: Is there anything you would do to improve this meeting?

Below is a summary of feedback from a few students, where I addressed her concerns and worked to resolve any problems. One student said she found her experience with community members satisfying and enjoyable, despite facing communication challenges due to limited vocabulary. Teaching games and discussing cities were both seen as fun and educational. The student valued conversational practice in Hindi but mentioned running out of questions and not knowing what to talk about after a while. To address this, I had the class generate questions for the community members.

After selecting and organizing the questions, students practiced around fifty questions with each other before engaging with the community partners, boosting their conversational skills and confidence.

Another student described the meeting as enlightening, gaining insight into the lives of two Indian girls. He said he was able to practice Hindi with their help, and the prior preparations, including a question bank, improved his conversational skills. He enjoyed the participation of community partners and aspired to repeat the experience. A personal highlight was speaking in Hindi for an extended period. He said that they showed each other their rooms, the art hanging on their walls, and their living spaces. This bridged the gap between their different lifestyles, and they were fascinated with each other's work and lives. It made them talk more about their surroundings. For future improvement, he suggests learning varied phrases to express confusion beyond the repetitive use of *kya* ('what') and *pata*

nahin ('I don't know'). To address this, the class watched several clips of informal conversations, paying attention to phrases and expressions used, significantly enhancing students' speaking abilities.

Yet another student expressed that reconnecting with the DYAF members was rewarding. Regular interactions improved her language skills, and she was pleasantly surprised by her ability to keep up with the conversation. The small group size allowed for easy flow, making the idioms lesson interactive. To stay connected, we could exchange contacts for language support or start a pen pal system for card or message exchanges. I had assigned each community partner to a student so they could communicate with one another. However, due to some partners being unable to attend and new ones joining, it was challenging to match the same partners for subsequent meetings. Nevertheless, I showed my students how they could stay in touch with their partners via Facebook.

4. Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Service-Learning

In this final section, I will address some challenges that I faced in implementing service-learning, such as difficulties in finding a partner, handling time zone differences, balancing class assignments, the role of instructors as intermediaries, and instructing students in being mindful towards community partners.

4.1. Finding a community partner

One of the main challenges I faced was finding a suitable community partner. This proved to be particularly difficult for Less Commonly Taught Languages, as access to local communities can be limited. In the USA, Indian community partners typically speak English and may not be able to engage in Hindi conversation with our students. When we contacted potential community partners in India, many expressed more interest in what our institute could offer them, such as adopting their NGO or sponsoring their visit to the USA. This discouraged me from reaching out further. However, I came across a promising community partner on

social media and visited them during a trip to India. I found that they were sincere and dedicated to making a positive impact in society, with goals that aligned with ours. As a result, we decided to team up.

It is possible for new programs seeking community partners to find them online, but they should also meet them personally to see their work and discuss how collaboration will work. The terms and conditions of collaboration should be clearly discussed and agreed upon to ensure no assumptions are left for either party.

4.2. Time zone difference

Another challenge I faced was the time zone difference between India and the USA, as well as occasional internet connectivity issues. To mitigate these issues, we usually meet on weekend mornings with our partners. The internet connectivity issues are still a problem but are generally manageable. Sometimes I put two partners and two students in the same breakout group so that if one partner's connection is not good, they can still talk to one another.

4.3. Balancing class teaching

Juggling between class teaching and service-learning courses

has been a major challenge for everyone. The latter demands

a considerable amount of time to prepare for the meetings,

leaving less time for other class activities such as teaching

grammar, conducting tests, and special activities like yoga,

dance, library visits, scavenger hunts, and film nights. I

suggest that one should start with small adjustments and

additions to a course and gradually build up the program to

make it more manageable. After all, effectively managing a

service-learning course requires a substantial amount of

preparation and careful time management.

4.4. Instructors act as a liaison

Running a service-learning course requires the instructor to

act as a liaison between the community partners and the

students. This involves informing the community partners

about the students' language abilities, vocabulary, and

grammar constructions, the materials covered in the class, as

well as keeping the students informed about the activities of

the community partners.

New programs should bear in mind that instructors need to communicate separately with students and community partners multiple times to discuss the program's details and progress. Both parties rely on the instructor for instructions and guidance. Occasionally, instructors may need to mediate issues between community partners and students.

4.5. Being Considerate

Stephanie Storm, in her article "Does service-learning Actually Help?" discusses a research paper which highlights the challenges faced by community partners. According to the paper, some community partners reported that students arrived unprepared and with unrealistic expectations of making a significant impact in a short period of time. Additionally, some community partners felt that they were being used as research subjects without any benefits to them (Storm, 2009). These findings illustrate the great responsibility placed on community partners when working with service-learning programs, emphasizing the need for

proper guidance and support for them.

According to Crosby and Brockmeier's (2017) chapter titled "Service-learning Online," the purpose of service-learning is to foster a philanthropic attitude among students that endures into adulthood (p. 156). But this focus on making students philanthropic raises concerns about the possibility of them viewing themselves as saviors rather than equals. To address this, I am mindful of my language when discussing community partners, avoiding stigmatizing terms like "needy" or "poor," and instead emphasizing the partners' inspiring contributions to their communities and families. I stress the importance of treating community partners with respect and equality, without any hint of condescension or pity. Ultimately, it is critical that students perceive themselves as collaborators, not saviors.

Based on my experience, during the initial reflection question after the first meeting of the service-learning program, I asked my students how they can help the

community partners, and eighty percent of the students suggested donating money, even though there was no indication that the DYAF had a need for fundraising at that time. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the contributions and benefits that the community partners bring to our courses, rather than viewing them solely as recipients of our help.

Conclusion

By examining various examples of different types of virtual service-learning programs, one can determine what works best for their own program. Each program offers an intriguing way to engage with the community, and the outcomes are remarkable. Even though they were conducted virtually, these programs had a significant impact on the thought processes of each participant. The experiences of working together will be unforgettable for them. Such experiences can greatly benefit students throughout their journey, helping them to better understand the people around

them and expand their cultural knowledge. I believe that virtual service-learning provides students with an immersive language learning experience without the need for extensive travel time.

Next, I plan to integrate the theme of climate change into my curriculum. Because I believe it's crucial for all of us to be aware of this issue and work together to effect change for future generations. We'll collaborate with our community partners to discuss our goals and how to achieve them together. This will involve creating posters and social awareness advertisements. This approach not only deepens students' understanding of the community's needs and expectations, especially given the limited-service opportunities within the local Hindi-speaking community; it also allows them to see the real-world applications of language and culture.

Through virtual meetings, students can observe actual work and progress. They share their paintings, songs, and

discuss current trends and school or college topics. Virtual service-learning and community engagement provide a focused environment where the emphasis is on the conversation. Going forward, I aim to continue enhancing my program by drawing lessons from other service-learning initiatives. Additionally, I intend to expand the curriculum to incorporate tutoring sessions covering fundamental topics like math and technology in addition to English lessons.

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