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ENHANCING TRANSFORMATIONAL LITERACY IN SLOVAKIA: IMPLEMENTING SERVICE AND E-SERVICE LEARNING IN ACADEMIA WITH NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE*

Abstract. This study investigates university instructors' awareness and readiness to implement service learning (SL) and electronic service learning (e-SL) within higher education, with a focus on Slovak departments of languages at Matej Bel University (MBU). Using qualitative data from interviews with ten instructors, the study explores perceptions, institutional support, and barriers to SL and e-SL adoption. Results reveal general awareness of SL, but limited familiarity with e-SL. Most participants indicated a willingness to undergo SL/e-SL training. However, a gap exists between the university's strategic commitment to SL and its practical support at the faculty level. This misalignment may hinder broader adoption of the methodology. The study concludes that successful implementation requires not only awareness and training but also structural and cultural shifts within academic institutions. SL and e-SL offer significant potential for advancing civic responsibility, inclusive education, and community engagement, yet their effectiveness depends on holistic institutional support and the redefinition of faculty roles.

Keywords: service learning; electronic service learning; higher education; faculty readiness; community engagement; institutional support

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PODNOSZENIE GOTOWOŚCI NA ZMIANY NA SŁOWACJI:
WDRAŻANIE SERVICE I E-SERVICE LEARNING
WŚRÓD NAUCZYCIELI AKADEMICKICH BEZ TAKIEGO DOŚWIADCZENIA

Abstakt. Niniejsze badanie analizuje świadomość i gotowość wykładowców uniwersyteckich do wdrażania metody nauki przez służbę (ang. *service learning* – SL) oraz uczenia się poprzez służbę w formie zdalnej (ang. *electronic service learning* – e-SL) w szkolnictwie wyższym, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem słowackich wydziałów filologicznych Uniwersytetu Mateja Bela (MBU). Wykorzystując dane jakościowe z wywiadów z dziesięcioma wykładowcami, badanie analizuje postrzeganie, wsparcie instytucjonalne i bariery utrudniające adopcję SL i e-SL. Wyniki pokazują ogólną wiedzę osób ankietowanych na temat SL, a także ograniczoną znajomość e-SL. Większość uczestników wyraziła chęć odbycia szkolenia w zakresie SL/e-SL. Istnieje jednak luka między strategicznym zaangażowaniem uniwersytetu w SL a jego praktycznym wsparciem na poziomie wydziałowym. Ta rozbieżność może utrudniać szersze przyjęcie tego sposobu uczenia. Badanie dowodzi, że skuteczne wdrożenie wymaga nie tylko świadomości i szkoleń, lecz także zmian strukturalnych i kulturowych w instytucjach akademickich. SL i e-SL mają znaczny potencjał w zakresie promowania odpowiedzialności obywatelskiej, edukacji inkluzywnej i zaangażowania społecznego, jednak ich skuteczność zależy od kompleksowego wsparcia instytucjonalnego i redefinicji ról kadry akademickiej.

Słowa kluczowe: uczenie się przez pracę; elektroniczne uczenie się przez pracę; szkolnictwo wyższe; gotowość wykładowców; zaangażowanie społeczności; wsparcie instytucjonalne

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought significant changes and challenges to education, particularly in the need for teaching methods to evolve in order to remain engaging, interactive, and activity-based. This applies to all areas of education, including language teaching at the university level. One of the emerging pedagogical approaches addressing these challenges is service learning (SL), a method that integrates community service into academic curricula to enhance learning through practical experience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SL evolved into its electronic counterpart, e-service learning (e-SL), as a necessary adaptation to remote learning environments. Initially perceived as a temporary solution to pandemic-related disruptions, e-SL quickly proved to be a successful and beneficial method, particularly for vulnerable groups such as individuals with disabilities, parents, the elderly, and other underserved communities.

Given its accessibility and the positive outcomes observed, e-SL has demonstrated promising long-term application potential in both academic institutions and community partners such as schools and after-school programs. Despite its growing relevance, there is limited research on whether university instructors

are prepared to integrate SL and e-SL into their teaching practices, particularly in institutions where these methodologies are relatively new or unfamiliar.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining university instructors' awareness of the benefits and challenges of SL and e-SL, their readiness to incorporate these approaches into their courses, and any preconceived notions they may hold. Our focus is on institutions and educators with little to no experience with service learning, aiming to provide insights to help them avoid potential barriers while successfully implementing these innovative teaching methods.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To investigate the evolution of service-learning as a "knowledge base," Narong and Hallinger (2024) have employed bibliometric methods in their review. They analysed 5,815 Scopus-indexed documents on service learning using descriptive statistics and science mapping. They concluded that service learning constitutes a mature, rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field, with over 75% of the documents published since 2010 – the argument that may be used to change the perception of service-learning as a worthless distraction from "serious research." However, despite its global scope, the literature remains concentrated in Western, economically developed nations. Subsequent research should explore service-learning in developing countries and the use of mixed research methods in exploring cultural, social, and political influences on service-learning outcomes.

There are many good reasons for employing a service-learning approach. According to Yusop & Correia (2013), it improves academic learning, increases motivation to learn and serve, and highlights civic values and broader social issues. On the other hand, the authentic and open nature of service-learning seems to contribute to intense group conflicts. The authors notably divided their research outcomes into three categories: benefits, challenges, and "hidden benefits resulting from overcoming challenges," with the latter group including the self-discovery and conflict management skills to be learned. In like manner, Ka & Law (2019) conducted a study that adopted the Faculty Engagement Model to conceptualize the factors affecting faculty engagement in SL at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Based on the online survey and individual interviews, they found out that over 80% of faculty believed that SL positively impacted student learning and community engagement, and only 28% indicated that SL had little influence on faculty research, promotion, and tenure. Resch & Schrittesser's (2023) findings

suggest five orientations in service-learning: connecting theory and practice, engagement, community needs, job-related skills, and learning outside the classroom. Their subjects take on distinct expert and support roles and see multiple benefits in service-learning. These include a deeper understanding of the course content and an enhanced sense of civic engagement.

The above is consistent with the benefits that SL (and e-SL) pedagogies might bring to any community-oriented faculty, as they were postulated in the e-Service Learning for More Digital and Inclusive EU Higher Educational Systems project, to which both authors of the current study contributed. Specifically, (e-) service-learning helps to:

1) Build learning systems with an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates community services into the students' curriculum

2) Promote a change in the traditional assistive model (service for the community) to a horizontal model of solidarity (service with the community)

3) Spread the knowledge on e-SL methodologies, developing training materials for academics to adopt e-SL in their teaching practices, guiding their students in implementing e-service-learning and assessing their learning while addressing the social needs of people with fewer opportunities, especially in cases of emergencies such as the pandemic or other disruptive events

4) Develop HE lecturers', trainers', and students' digital skills aimed at the implementation of e-SL methodologies

5) Link e-SL education and R&I with community needs

6) Put into practice students' hard and soft skills for community-engaged projects

7) Maximize social impact through community engagement and foster lecturers', trainers', and students' civic and social responsibility (inclusivity)

8) Foster students' prosocial behaviour through engagement with people with fewer opportunities

9) Provide educational pathways for students who have experienced barriers to accessing education due to geographic, social, economic, cultural, and migrant background obstacles

10) Foster students' entrepreneurial skills mainly in reference to social entrepreneurship

11) Involve local community agencies (NGOs and LAGs) to increase the local impact of international activities.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To confirm the potential of e-SL at non-pedagogical faculties, we conducted a qualitative research focused on the awareness of university teachers in Slovak philological departments of e-SL & SL, their constraints, and expectations of this methodology.

2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To identify instructors' awareness of SL & e-SL, their preparedness to integrate it, and preconceptions about the field, we followed the state-of-art research methodology (Brozmanová, 2015) and decided to conduct qualitative research based on ten interviews with Matej Bel University (MBU) instructors of English, both at philological (5 subjects) and non-philological faculties (5 subjects). Subjects included university teachers of future translators and interpreters and trainers of business professionals at MBU. The two selected departments have had no previous experience in SL and e-SL; thus, we were interested in the department members' overall readiness and interest in SL/e-SL methodology.

The research was conducted in person in June 2023, in accordance with the MBU GDPR policy and ethical standards. Interviews lasted between 11 minutes and 30 seconds and 39 minutes and 1 second (average duration: 24 minutes and 19 seconds). An external interviewer conducted the interviews to avoid potential emotional involvement between the interviewer and the interviewees. The data collected from the interviews was thoroughly processed, analyzed, and interpreted. The results are presented in Section 3 (Research Outcomes and Discussion) below.

2.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

Ten subjects (further: S1 – S10) were given a set of open questions focused on their awareness of SL and especially e-SL, personal experience and good practices, previous training, and increasing their expertise in the field. They were also asked about institutional support for integrating SL and e-SL into teaching their content. Their responses were clustered into sets, identifying the degree of awareness of SL and e-SL, or lack thereof. In order to reach objective results, we attempted to compile a random research sample:

Subject 1 was a 39-year-old instructor of Methodology of Translation with 12 years of teaching experience at MBU. She is also the manager of a professional translation company and is highly interested in bridging theoretical content studied in academia with practical application (Interview time: 11,30 minutes).

Subject 2 was a 55-year-old teacher of B2 and C1 English and ESP at the Faculty of Economics. As a native speaker, he has not received formal pedagogical training. He studied art and business management and has over 20 years of teaching experience at MBU (Interview time: 22,24 minutes).

Subject 3 was a 42-year-old instructor of Consecutive Interpreting and Philosophy of Translation at MBU, with 13 years of teaching experience. He is also a professional business translator and interpreter. He is actively involved in Service Learning projects and encourages his students to participate as well (Interview time: 26,05 minutes).

Subject 4 was a 39-year-old native speaker and instructor of B2 and C1 English, Didactics of the English Language, American Studies, and Conversation classes. He has been teaching at MBU since 2004 (Interview time: 31,32 minutes).

Subject 5 was a 36-year-old male instructor of English literature, artistic text translation, and C1-level English, with 15 years of teaching experience in academia. He is IT-literate but does not consider the use of technology in teaching essential. However, he teaches online courses and has completed training in online learning and teaching, as well as in the use of PowerPoint in education. He is reportedly familiar with Service Learning (SL) and e-SL learning and teaching (Interview time: 17,54 minutes).

Subject 6 was a 53-year-old male instructor specializing in phonetics and phonology, British history, and academic writing. He has 26 years of teaching experience in academia. Roman is IT-literate, interested in the use of technology in education, and familiar with online courses. He has completed training in online learning and teaching, as well as in the use of PowerPoint in education. He is particularly interested in integrating learning with practical applications (Interview time: 20,22 minutes).

Subject 7 was a 44-year-old instructor of American literature and selected literary courses, currently working part-time at MBU. She has 13 years of teaching experience at MBU (Interview time: 20,49 minutes).

Subject 8 was a 54-year-old instructor of B2 and C1 English and ESP at the Faculty of Economics. She has over 20 years of teaching experience at MBU. She also teaches part time at Public Language School. She is familiar with IT and its use in the English Classroom (Interview time: 31,13 minutes).

Subject 9 was a 56-year-old instructor of B2 and C1 English and ESP at the Faculty of Economics. She has 15 years of teaching experience at MBU. She regularly teaches online courses and has completed training in online learning and teaching (Interview time: 18,56 minutes).

Subject 10 was a 51-year-old instructor of B2 and C1 English and ESP at the Faculty of Economics. She has over 20 years of teaching experience at MBU. She occasionally teaches online courses (Interview time: 39,01 minutes).

Through the method of thematic coding, we attempted to diagnose the status of awareness of SL and e-SL at MBU and suggest potential ways of integrating SL and e-SL methodology into the existing curricula and study programs.

2.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following on from the above, the general research question was formulated:

RQ: What is the current status quo for SL and e-SL awareness among MBU teaching staff?

To get the answer, semi-structured interviews based on the following questions were conducted:

Q1: Are MBU instructors aware of the notion of "service learning"?

Q2: Are MBU instructors aware of the notion of "electronic service learning"?

Q3: (After defining SL) Do MBU instructors think they could integrate the principles of SL into the methodology of the subjects they are currently teaching?

Q4: (After defining e-SL) Do MBU instructors think they could integrate the principles of e-SL into the methodology of the subjects they are currently teaching?

Q5: Do MBU instructors think they would benefit from training in SL methodology?

Q6: Do MBU instructors think they would benefit from training in e-SL methodology?

Q7: Are MBU instructors aware of any institutional barriers at their workplace to implementing SL in the subjects they are currently teaching?

Q8: Are MBU instructors aware of any institutional barriers at their workplace to implementing e-SL in the subjects they are currently teaching?

3. RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSION

This section provides analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the interviews conducted with the 10 research subjects (above). Each subsection tackles two questions, including a respective extension of relevant information, if necessary.

3.1 Q1 AND Q2

Table 1 shows selected responses to Q1: Are MBU instructors aware of the notion of "service-learning"? and Q2: Are MBU instructors aware of the notion of "electronic service learning"?

Tabel 1. MBU instructors' awareness of SL and e-SL

SL	E-SL
S1,5: *learning by participating in practice, **solving a real community problem*** ✓	S1,5: *same as SL, e.g., **online interpreting o teaching, also various clubs (senior reading club, immigrant support group*** ✓
S2: *I have read the term but I am not familiar with it//does not understand it* ✗	S2: *I have read the term but I am not familiar with it //considers it an oxymoron* ✓
S3: *not sure, something like transmitting academic skills to real life* ✗	S3,9: *no idea* ✗
S4,6,8: *learning via volunteering, serving a specific community group* ✓	S4,6: *I have not come across the term but I can imagine what it is* ✗
S7: *learning with value added for community and learners*	S7: *the same as SL, just online*
S9: *learning during a project, practical method of acquiring skills for life* ✓	S8: *S receives some skills via online teaching, then expands his/her expertise by work in community* ✗

Source: authors.

Table 1 shows that the MBU instructors were generally aware of the SL methodology but were less familiar with e-SL. Due to the lack of formal instruction in both, as seen with Subject S3, some participants confused SL with academic skills and their application. Subjects S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 had a very vague or no understanding of e-SL yet subjects 4 and 6 assumed they "can imagine" the meaning.

3.2 Q3 AND Q4

In response to Q3 (Do you think you could integrate principles of SL into the methodology of subjects you are currently teaching?) and Q4 (Do you think you could integrate principles of e-SL into the methodology of subjects you are currently teaching?), the following responses were recorded (Tabel 2):

Tabel 2. MBU instructors' willingness to integrate SL
and e-SL methodology into their syllabi

SL	E-SL
S1: teaching programme – student teaching of EFL for other depts.; community translating, interp. ; *S9: seminars, workshops for our Ss, soft skills development (with coop. With other faculties)*	*S1,7: same as SL, e.g online interpreting or teaching, - it has already been implemented. S7: many experiences gained in C19 could be used; the need to take a SL, e-SL instruction course first; S8: volunteering (e.g. teaching financial literacy), S9: seminars, workshops for our Ss, soft skills development*
S2, S10: no response, I don´t know	*S2: a kind of Moodle-supported instruction*
S3,4,5,6,7: high, immense possibilities. S5: personal-tailored courses (not too academic), S7,8: courses for marginalised groups	*S3: sceptical – will not work, personal contact in our field is irreplicable; S10: no*
	S4: no response
S4,8: yes, learning via volunteering	*S5,6: like SL, just online, but I see more negative of the online space than positives*

Source: authors.

The second cluster of answers responded to the potential of implementing SL and e-SL in their respective departments. Table 2 demonstrates that two subjects were skeptical and could not see the potential of SL at their departments. Other subjects came up with specific suggestions on how SL could be implemented into particular courses.

We found it very encouraging that three subjects, in terms of e-SL, came up with suggestions for implementation; S1 and 7 felt they had already been using e-SL methods.

Five subjects (2, 3, 4, 5, 6) were either skeptical and could not see ways of implementing e-SL or were reluctant to extend students' exposure to online classes.

Again, the reasons here may lie in inadequate or non-existent instructions for calibrating their estimates (these instructors would very well benefit from our online E-SL course for instructors).

3.3. Q5 AND Q6

In response to Q5: Do you think you would benefit from training in SL methodology? and Q6: Do you think you would benefit from training in e-SL methodology? the following questions have been recorded (Table 3):

Table 3. Instructors' willingness to participate in SL and e-SL training

SL	E-SL
S1: *not necessary for me, I know the ropes*	S1,7: *if there is something new, yes*
S2: *only if focused on hard skills*	S2: *only if focused on new comp. skills*
S3,4,6,8,9: *yes* S7,10: *perhaps yes*	S3,4: *no*
S5: *only if fundamental administrative authorities were clearly stipulated*	S5: *only if fundamental administrative authorities were clearly stipulated*
	S6,8,9: *yes*; S7,10: *perhaps yes*

Source: authors.

The following cluster of responses, no. III, attempted to identify instructors' feelings of lack of expertise and need for personal development in this field.

6 Subjects declared their wish to take the SL course and considered it stimulating. S5 pointed out the lack of institutional support for SL.

5 Subjects declared the wish to take the e-SL course and considered it stimulating. S5 pointed out the lack of institutional support for SL. 2 subjects conditioned their participation on specific skills.

3.4 Q7 AND Q8

Finally, in response to Q7: Are you aware of any institutional barriers at your workplace to implementing SL in the subjects you are currently teaching? and Q8: Are you aware of any institutional barriers at your workplace to implementing e-SL in the subjects you are currently teaching? the following answers have been collected (Table 4):

Table 4. Institutional barriers to implementing SL
and e-SL at your workplace

SL	E-SL
S2,3,5: *lack of institutional support, university red tape*	S1: *it may resemble too much of C19 online teaching, Ss may find it boring*
S4: *I am not sure how to implement SL into translation classes*	S2,3,5: *lack of institutional support, S3: university red tape; S6: lack of IT support*
S6: *Target group – community partners*	S4: *I would miss personal contact*
S8: *Ss*	S7: *Unpreparedness of instructors for effective management*
S9,10: *I see no barriers, but there might be some*	S8: *Ss*
	S9, 10: *I see no barriers, but there might be some*

Source: authors.

Table 4 displays subjects' views on the hurdles and barriers instructors see or expect in implementing SL or e-SL courses in their departments. Responses generally show little awareness of instructors regarding the complex procedure of planning, implementing, conducting, supervising, and evaluating SL or e-SL courses. That opens up the space for promoting the new meta-e-SL course for instructors, navigating them to effective implementation of the idea of e-SL, shifting responsibility for one's education to students, and changing the role of teachers to facilitators.

RESEARCH RESULTS: DISCUSSION

Gathered data helped to formulate the status quo of MBU instructors' awareness of SL/e-SL as follows:

SL and e-SL are not well-established concepts in the minds of MBU instructors. They either rely on inaccurate preconceptions or do not fully understand the terms and their potential. Moreover, they do not feel a strong need to incorporate SL/e-SL methods into their syllabi or to innovate their teaching practices using SL/e-SL methodologies. Nor do they express a desire to learn more about these approaches. Instead, they perceive SL/e-SL as applicable to vague "other" courses, programs, or instructors, not to their own teaching. They also see many other problems, such as lack of IT, administrative, and institutional support.

To clarify these research findings, we referred to university documentation outlining its mission and vision, as well as relevant international research.

First, one possible explanation for the low level of instructors' awareness of SL/e-SL may lie in the gap between the university's *de jure* (official) and *de facto* (practical) support for these innovative teaching and learning methods. Some respondents indicated that they *had read or heard the term SL/e-SL but were not familiar with it*. Others did not perceive its potential, or felt that while SL/e-SL might be useful, it was *not necessarily relevant to them*. To investigate low awareness of SL/e-SL and their potential at UMB more thoroughly, we first examined the university documentation to identify how SL and e-SL are conceptualized in the official documents (specifically, *The University Statute*, focusing on *The Mission and Vision of Matej Bel University*, and the *Faculty Statute*). The *University Statute* implicitly mentions "high-quality university education as well as a wide spectrum of further education corresponding to the requirements of society," which aims to foster "intelligent, moral, authentic, and socially responsible individuals" (*The Mission*). Moreover, the mission of MBU explicitly lists, as a quality indicator, the "number and share of study programs

(SPs) using Service Learning; the number of subjects incorporating Service Learning; and the proportion of teachers employing Service Learning in teaching technological innovations and interactive elements."

At MBU, the general legislative framework for service learning in the Slovak Republic stems from the university's mission and vision, emphasizing education that meets societal needs, forming socially responsible individuals, and creating a learning society. However, the *Faculty of Arts Statute* does not further elaborate on the university's conceptualization of SL and e-SL. It only briefly mentions "I.2.2 Implementation of new methods, forms, and technological trends in teaching" (*The Mission*).

This reveals a surprising discrepancy: Although the general *MBU Mission* explicitly recognizes SL and e-SL as quality indicators, this is not reflected in individual faculty statutes. As a result, faculties such as the *Faculty of Economics* and the *Faculty of Arts* do not fully align with the university's mission regarding the philosophy of their course offerings.

Regarding low awareness of MBU instructors, we conclude that there is a legislative gap in the recognition and support of SL and e-SL within the university framework, which does not sufficiently encourage or promote the use of these methodologies at individual workplaces. We attribute the lack of awareness among subjects S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 regarding SL and e-SL to this legislative oversight, which results from the absence of explicit recognition of SL and e-SL in the university documentation.

Secondly, our research results correspond with international research: in search of comparable data showing the level of SL awareness and involvement of faculty members, we have scrutinized different studies of different provenance. For instance, Hou and Wilder (2015) used the TTM method to examine service-learning (SL) beliefs and participation among faculty in various stages of involvement after having recruited a representative sample of 1.200 faculty members at a major public university in the Southeast United States. Along with Abes et al. (2002), Hammond (1994), and many others, they concluded that increased SL awareness and involvement are still needed, and faculty who use this approach in one course are inclined to utilize it in future ones. The most significant motivating factors for adopting SL include greater relevance to the course material, improved teaching and learning experiences, enhanced purpose and meaning found in interaction with the community, and the development of university-community partnerships. Despite being conducted over twenty years ago and in different educational contexts, the studies by Abes et al. (2002) and Hammond (1994) remain relevant to the situation at MBU in 2023.

Another research (Antonio et al., 2000) concluded that less than 3% of faculty use service-learning. Moreover, those who do are often marginalized by the faculty community and/or perceived as less influential. In line with the research above, this may be due, in part, to a professional culture in higher education that values research and publications and rewards those activities with salary and promotion incentives. Therefore, systems change around engagement can only occur when there is recognition that scholarly work is not limited to peer-reviewed articles (Fitzgerald, 2010). Holland (2006) also observes that too often, faculty assume that in a campus community partnership, the faculty's role is to teach, the student's role is to learn, and the community partner's role is to provide a laboratory or set of needs to address or to explore.

Most importantly, Borkoski and Prosser (2020) also examined university faculty's perception of service-learning. They found that despite the awareness of service-learning benefits and reported interest in learning about and using this pedagogy, service-learning practices are still considered an additional workload rather than an integrated role. Faculty members were concerned about mixed messages regarding the value of investment in this practice, including the lack of recognition in promotion, as their professional obligations are mainly related to research publications. Although they considered teaching equally important to research, they perceived that the institution valued teaching and service as less important than research. Along with the existing literature and our findings, this is yet another piece of evidence that community engagement activities should be embedded in faculty roles and rewards become institutionalized.

CONCLUSION

Many authors (Šipošová, 2021; Höhn, 2017; Brozmanová, 2015; and Lojová & Kostelníková, 2018) have already highlighted the need for innovation in education, specifically in foreign language teaching across linguistic, literary, and even culture-related disciplines. SL and e-SL projects have enormous potential for the future as they help develop the University's Third Mission into social engagement, increase HEI's social responsibility, and use SL and e-SL methodology to improve the students' hard and soft skills through practical experience. In no small part, they are also set to generate a positive impact on the community organizations they will work with and, consequently, on the wider society.

The research presented above proved that SL and e-SL in educational environments with little or no previous experience with SL/e-SL can only function if

they are holistically and synergically supported by the institution and its bodies (such as faculties and departments). Support of such methodologies should include a broad spectrum of areas: administrative, legislative, personnel, know-how, and IT. To tackle teachers' reluctance in non-pedagogical departments, training, instruction, motivational seminars, personal participation in successful SL, and e-SL training as a host teacher can be used to turn resistance into enthusiasm. At the same time, implementing SL/e-SL requires nothing less than a change of mindset regarding the role of the teacher, course, and academia. This includes three essential objectives: teachers as instructors and facilitators rather than old-school authoritarian knowledge stacks, courses with solid and dynamic connections to the world outside, especially local communities, and, finally, the transformation of a traditional image of academia as a hard-to-reach ivory tower into the one of an open-door community centre.

Apart from the external perception of academia, another mindset shift – already advocated by experts (Šipošová, 2021, p. 149) – is necessary: elevating the status of service-learning as a research subject. This would help ensure that its internal perception among faculty members no longer creates a mental barrier to its broader adoption, as is currently the case. Put differently, an extra academic weight should be assigned to SL projects as verbal appreciation cannot match the points teachers earn when conducting scientific research. However, this is the challenge for higher-level institutions, i.e., ministries or other relevant state departments, rather than universities that lack competencies to this effect.

The gains earned by participation in SL and e-SL may be short and long-term. They include respect and PR of a university in the community, as well as contributions to the formation of inclusive higher education systems with curricula corresponding with the requirements of the society/community while enhancing the concept of life-long learning. The fundamental goal, i.e., producing moral, authentic, and socially responsible graduates, is also embedded in the fruitful collaboration between academia and the community.

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