

Bridging Classroom and Community: A Service-Learning Project to Address Child Labor

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Teaching Context

The project described below is for university-level students in Pakistan learning English as a Foreign Language at intermediate proficiency. These students will address the pressing issue of child labor while enhancing their language skills through experiential learning. The project aims to combine social action with language acquisition, empowering students to make a tangible difference while developing critical linguistic and civic skills.

Problem

Child labor remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan, where socio-economic challenges and cultural norms force millions of children to forgo education in favor of work (UNICEF, 2024). Despite awareness campaigns, many families view child labor as a necessary survival strategy, perpetuating cycles of poverty and deprivation.

In classrooms, students often learn about social issues theoretically, with limited opportunities to engage directly with real-world challenges. This disconnect diminishes their ability to apply knowledge practically and inhibits their understanding of civic responsibility. Additionally, English language acquisition in Pakistan often lacks authentic contexts for practice, leading to disengagement and slower development of communication skills (Richards, 2015).

Solution

By combining experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) with task-based language teaching (Nunan, 2004), this project will empower students to actively address child labor while improving their language proficiency through meaningful, real-world tasks. This project will integrate service-learning with task-based language teaching by partnering with [The Citizens Foundation \(TCF\)](#), a



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non-profit organization combating child labor through education. This three-phase project—prefection, service, and reflection—will allow students to engage in real-world action while fostering critical thinking, social responsibility, and linguistic competence.

Teaching Techniques and Project Design

Phase 1: Preflection

1. Research and Awareness

Students will divide into groups and analyze case studies on child labor in Pakistan such as [Child Labor in Pakistan: A Study of the Lahore Area](#). They will focus on causes, consequences, and government policies such as the Punjab Restriction on Employment Act.

Students will compile findings into comparative charts and answer guiding questions such as: “What are the key drivers of child labor in rural versus urban areas?” and “How does access to education correlate with reduced child labor?”

2. Brainstorming Challenges

Anticipated challenges, such as community resistance or linguistic barriers, will be identified during group discussions. Strategies such as bilingual communication and empathy-driven dialogues to cope with these barriers will be developed.

3. Preparation Workshops

- **Persuasive Communication:** Students will practice delivering impactful presentations to families and stakeholders so that they may overcome resistance (embrace acceptance).
- **Task-Based Language Preparation:** Being learners of English as a Foreign Language, they will do activities including report writing and preparing multilingual handouts. They will be instructed to create lesson plans for 30-minute sessions with those laborers comprising beginner level English language activities.

Phase 2: Service Phase

1. Partnering with TCF

Students will formally collaborate with TCF to support their educational initiatives targeting children rescued from labor. They will tour shops where child laborers are employed and conduct interviews of these children. They will mentor rescued children and for that they will prepare lesson plans and materials.

2. Engagement Activities

Teaching Assistance: To prepare the child laborers for a better future by educating them, students will design two 30-minute lessons on English literacy (e.g., forming sentences with nouns and verbs) and numeracy (e.g., solving basic addition problems using counters). Teaching aids, such as illustrated flashcards and interactive storybooks, will be created.

Students will:

- create eye-catching posters to post around town where vulnerable families will see them, e.g., at the market, train stations, etc. The students will create posters using Canva, Adobe Photoshop or other software and obtain prints of these posters. The purpose of this activity will be to educate the general population about the urgency of the issue.
- assist in creating bilingual educational materials, including illustrated booklets and advertising leaflets that will help educate the families and the public in general. They will do this activity in groups and prepare the material, which will be distributed among the general public and especially among the parents of child laborers.
- create multimedia campaigns, such as videos and info-graphics, to spread awareness about child labor law. These campaigns will also be about how education can be more valuable than doing labor for such children. The students will post their videos on social media. These videos will also be shared on the official web pages of the English literacy program.

3. Language Application

English will be used for all activities, including lesson delivery, workshop discussions, and reflection writing, ensuring immersive practice.

Phase 3: Reflection Phase

1. Reflective Blog Writing

Students will write blog posts using the “What, So What, Now What” framework (Rolfe et al., 2001). These posts will explore their personal growth, the community impact, and potential future advocacy actions.

2. Group Discussions

Students will share their reflections through presentations, which can foster collaboration and critical thinking. The presentations will be in groups. The presentations will be in poster format, in which three stations will be set up for concurrent presentations and the non-presenting students and invited guests (students and teachers in other classes, students’ families, and community members) will be the audience. After each presentation round, the students will switch roles.

Extension

Sustainable Engagement: Schools could institutionalize annual service-learning projects to maintain momentum and expand community impact.

Discussion

In this project, authentic task-based activities will improve fluency and confidence (Kiely, 2014). Direct involvement with TCF will enhance students’ understanding of child labor and inspire continued advocacy. Challenges such as community resistance will be addressed with empathetic communication and relatable success stories. These success stories will be posted on social media

in reels and short videos. Logistical barriers, such as scheduling conflicts, will require flexibility and collaboration.

Conclusion

This project addresses the critical issue of child labour while fostering students' language skills and civic responsibility. By integrating service-learning with task-based language teaching, it provides a replicable model for educators seeking to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world challenges. The combination of experiential learning and advocacy not only prepares students for global citizenship but also empowers them to drive meaningful social change.

This initiative demonstrates how education can transcend traditional classroom boundaries, equipping students with the tools to become agents of change. By addressing child labour through immersive language practice, the project highlights the power of combining academic goals with community action to create a more equitable and educated society.

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