

VOICES FROM THE FIELD: CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

**Second Language Learning for Activism and Service: A Project for Environmental Protection and Sustainability**

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**Teaching Context**

Location: Karachi, Pakistan.

Student's Profile: Students aged between thirteen to seventeen, intermediate English Language proficiency.

Program: US Department of State funded Access Scholarship Program, aimed at teaching the fundamentals of English language, developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and gaining cultural competence by providing knowledge of American culture and values.

**Problem**

Plastic pollution is a critical global problem which poses significant risks to human health, contributes to loss of bio-diversity and leads to severe environmental degradation, especially in developing countries such as Pakistan. Over 2 million tons of plastic waste is generated annually in the country, of which over 86% is mismanaged. (WWF-Pakistan, 2025)

Among the plastic waste components produced in Pakistan is a great presence of single-use plastic bags with an estimated 55 billion already in use and an anticipated 15% rise in annual usage. (WWF-Pakistan, 2025) Karachi, a giant of a city located on the coast of the Arabian Sea is an urban metropolis that serves as the country's financial, commercial, and industrial hub. Combined with its port activities and administrative capacity as capital of the province of Sindh it is home to a staggering 20.3 million people according to the 2023 Census of Pakistan and is one of the major contributors to the crisis.



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Hence, there is a need for an immediate call to action to create awareness among the masses and devise strategic plans for waste curtailment, collection and recycling practices in local communities.

Although English language learners within most Pakistani classroom contexts are largely exposed to environmental issues such as this as general topics of study or discussion, there is little opportunity for real-world engagement that allows for active inquiry and research, field exposure and utilization of acquired language skills in practical situations to build communicative competence or allow integration of language learning with other subjects through application of principles of project/task based learning.

In most language programs' curricula there is limited to no opportunity for the incorporation of elements of service-learning, experiential learning or project-based/task-based learning. Instead, there is a staunch focus on traditional teaching methods based on grammar rules, vocabulary and translations therefore, service-learning and experiential learning remain largely underutilized to address real-world issues such as environmental protection and sustainability to provide opportunities for students to practice language use in practical environments.

### **Solution**

The following project is designed to create opportunities for active community engagement among youth encouraging them to confront environmental challenges such as pollution and contribute to environmental conservation and activism efforts while leveraging students' language learning providing context driven, authentic real-world experience and exposure.

The project will incorporate experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and service learning design in L2 language learning blended with task-based teaching and learning (Nunan, 2004), spanning over three phases of pre-service, service and reflection stages, incorporating the IPARD (Investigation, Planning & Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration) framework, a complete process for project design which allows students to immersively experience service learning (Service-Learning – National Youth Leadership Council, n.d.). Since no active agency currently addresses this specific issue in the local context, the project will simulate the creation of an independent student-led awareness agency to respond to the problem or prompt new partnerships with potential agencies such as WWF, which are working in other related causes throughout Pakistan to initiate collaborative projects in Karachi as well.

### **Teaching Techniques and Project Design**

**Objectives.** The project is designed with the following language and civic engagement considerations:

1. To raise community awareness regarding the harmful effects of polythene bags.
2. To enhance students' language skills for effective social activism.
3. To develop practical vocabulary and grammar through real-world environmental content.
4. To contribute to environmental protection by reducing the use of polythene bags.
5. To foster community cooperation and shared responsibility in addressing environmental challenges.

**Pre-Reflection Activity.** To introduce the problem, students will be shown a short documentary video highlighting the pollution caused by plastic bags in Karachi (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFVy-YjuaiI>). The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with the severity of the issue in an urban context. After viewing the video, a guided discussion initially utilizing lower order thinking skills will be conducted with sample warm-up questions such as:

1. Why should plastic bags be banned?
2. What diseases may arise due to the presence of plastics in the environment?
3. Suggest an alternative to plastic.

This stage will encourage students to engage with the problem before practical project work.

**Project Orientation Session.** An orientation session will be conducted to familiarize students with the hazards associated with polythene bags and to provide an overview of the project. In this session, facilitators/teachers will provide a student handbook and deliver a presentation outlining:

1. What is Service Learning?
2. Project duration/timeline.
3. Course credits or grades.
4. Basic or introductory information about the issue addressed.
5. Stakeholder introduction and their roles (School, Teachers, Students, Agency and Community).
6. Project goals.
7. Code of conduct.
8. Consent/waiver forms.

### ***The Student Service-Learning Experience: The IPARD Process***

The IPARD structure can be put in place under the support and guidance of the teachers/facilitators as it actively involves students with the service learning project providing room for developing their academic, social and civic learning capacities.

The investigation stage allows participants to develop their research and critical thinking skills directly engaging with community problems and various forms of information sources while the planning and preparation stage prepares them for field engagement and develops resourcefulness as students learn to budget/gain funding, obtain materials, create partnerships, design project timelines and structures, prepare materials through technology for media and content management and design, working in teams and taking up leadership, setting accountability and roles for coordination and communication. During the action stage, they experience on-going reflection and develop project management skills to adapt to changing situations and needs during the project, they develop conscientiousness, empathy and people skills. During the reflection and demonstration stages, students reflect on their overall experience before sharing it with others as concrete evidence of learning, broadening their perspectives and enriching their experiences with feedback and further growth.

**Investigation Stage.** Project Planning Session(s): In this session or series of sessions students will be given the opportunity to delve deep into the problem and strategize project execution to achieve their targets (see Appendices A and B for a sample support vocabulary and planning graphic organizer).

The teacher/facilitator will lead guided discussions utilizing higher-order thinking tasks such as:

1. Identify three common uses of polythene bags in your surroundings.
2. Describe the negative impacts faced by your community (Farmers/City residents/Fishermen) due to the excessive use of polythene bags.
3. Highlight the steps taken by the Government / Agencies or NGOs) / Community members so far to solve the problems.
4. Explain the reasons for delayed change to tackle the issue?

Students will then work together in groups to:

1. Identify target communities to work with. (e.g. farmers, fishermen, or the general public).
2. Discuss project goals and their roles as responsible citizens of Karachi.
3. Engage in guided discussion questions.
4. Formulate research/inquiry based questions for surveys or interviews for data collection from the community during initial visits.
5. List required resources. (e.g. for a clean-up drive jute and paper sacks, gloves, trash bins and bags, sanitizers/wipes, masks, caps, grippers, drinks and snacks may be needed.)
6. Anticipate potential problems or issues to be faced in execution of activities. (e.g. language barriers, weather/time constraints, budget constraints, finding a relevant agency, accessibility, community resistance or learner attitudes).
7. Come up with solutions to overcome these possible difficulties.

Community Exploration and Needs Assessment: Students will visit the site to engage with members of the community, take a closer look at the issues they face first hand and gather relevant data and information to further their project. Students will also be able to build rapport and camaraderie with the community members, reducing chances of resistance.

**Planning and Preparation Stage.** Students will start preparing relevant awareness content in English and Urdu e.g. posters, flyers, brochures, banners, roller standees, informative animated videos and presentations to spread awareness in the community using AI tools or design software such as Canva. Students will design content strategies for social media campaigns by creating Instagram and Facebook accounts to increase outreach, create wider impact and encourage others to join or support their efforts.

**Action Stage.** Students will visit the site and begin their service-learning activities in groups as per their chosen interests and capabilities, activities can be rotational to allow every group to experience and develop diverse skills such as:

1. Clean-Up Drives: Students will visit the identified sites and conduct trash collection focusing on polythene-bags, manage trash sorting into different categories, coordinate send-off for disposals and demonstrations will be carried out about alternatives available and how to use them to the various members of the community.
2. Door to Door Awareness Campaigns: Students will dedicate stalls and spaces to run awareness camps for the community. They will visit homes, shops, and markets in the vicinity to spread awareness discouraging the use of polythene bags. Students will introduce the alternates and the disadvantages of the usage of the polythene bags. Awareness messages and pictorial awareness will be pasted at the garbage dumping sides to revoke the usage of polythene bags.
3. Content Creation: Students will shoot long or short form content for platforms such as YouTube or Instagram to document and share their entire efforts with a larger audience. Filming Documentaries/Short-films or Social Media content such as reels or shorts can also allow them to highlight key areas, share people's interactions and use cinematic content to promote the cause and find connections.

**Reflection Stage.** Students will engage in a variety of activities for on-going reflection. This will allow them to further polish and practice their English Language skills, evaluate the progress of their project and their efforts, and gain valuable feedback for improvement from mentors/facilitators/teachers and their peers. Some suggested activities students may engage in include:

1. Graphic Organizers and Exit tickets
2. 8-Panel Zine/ Mini-Comics
3. Reflective Circles or Group Discussions
4. Photo Journals or Reflective Essays
5. Blog, Vlogs or Podcasts
6. One Minute Videos/ Reels or Shorts
7. Report Writing

**Demonstration Stage.** Students will show evidence of learning in the form of culmination project presentations which can be in the form of a poster or digital presentations conducted as a showcase at their center inviting family, friends, community members and media to cascade their knowledge, raise awareness, invite or motivate others to join the cause and open the floor for questions, comments and general feedback to help them improve from their experiences while utilizing gained language skills.(Refer to Appendix C for a sample project rubric.)

## Conclusion

This initiative targets the alarming issue of plastic pollution, specifically the one caused by the use of polythene bags in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. It incorporates L2 English language learning utilizing task-based teaching and learning strategies and promotes social engagement with the elements of experiential learning, synthesized with service learning design.

Projects such as this allow the scope of language learning across all four skills; beyond the restrictions of classroom learning only providing real-world, authentic engagement platforms. It also promotes a sense of civic responsibility, accountability, empathy and involvement to address issues critically and utilize one's skills, knowledge, talents for the greater good of all people. Thus, students become active global citizens and ambassadors for change.

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## Appendix A

### Discouraging the Use of Polythene Bags Project – Vocabulary Bank

1. Advocacy – Public support for or recommendation of a cause or policy
2. Awareness – Knowledge or understanding of an issue
3. Ban – Official order to stop using something
4. Biodegradable – Able to break down naturally
5. Camaraderie – Friendship and trust among a group
6. Challenge – A difficulty or problem faced
7. Collaboration – Cooperating to complete tasks
8. Community – A group of people living in one place
9. Demonstration – Showing how something works
10. Eco-friendly – Safe for the environment
11. Environmental issues – Problems related to nature and surroundings
12. Feedback – Opinions or reactions from others
13. Goal – What you want to achieve
14. Human health – Well-being of people’s physical and mental condition
15. Impact – The effect or influence of an activity
16. Implementation – Putting a plan into action
17. Interaction – Communication between people
18. Non-biodegradable – Does not break down naturally
19. Objective – The aim or purpose of a project
20. Outcome – The result of a project
21. Participation – Taking part in an activity
22. Plan – Steps decided before starting
23. Plastic – A synthetic material used widely, often harmful to nature
24. Plastic waste components – Different parts of plastic waste
25. Pollution – Making the environment dirty or unsafe
26. Preflection – Thinking ahead about what may happen or be learned
27. Project – A planned piece of work to achieve a goal
28. Rapport – A friendly, harmonious relationship
29. Reflection – Thinking back about what was learned
30. Resistance – Opposition or unwillingness to change
31. Reusable – Can be used again and again
32. Service Learning – Learning through community service and reflection
33. Solution – A way to solve a problem
34. Strategy – A method or idea used to reach a goal
35. Success – Achieving the desired goal
36. Sustainable – Something that can be maintained without harm
37. Teamwork – Working together with others
38. Underutilized – Not used to its full potential
39. Urban metropolis – A very large, busy city
40. Waste curtailing – Reducing or limiting waste

## **Appendix B**

### **Graphic Organizer for Project Planning**

[Link to editable Canva document](#)

See PDF copy on the next pages



# Service Learning Project

## Discouraging the Use of Polythene Bags in Village Communities

The project described below is designed for students aged between thirteen to seventeen with intermediate English Language proficiency who are acquiring the fundamentals of English language and knowledge of American culture and values as part of the US Department of State funded Access Scholarship Program in Karachi, Pakistan.

### **STEP 1: PROJECT GOAL**

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

(EXAMPLE: CREATE AWARENESS IN THE VILLAGE ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF POLYTHENE BAGS AND PROMOTE ECO-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVES.)



# Service Learning Project

Theme: Discouraging Polythene Bags in Village Communities

## STEP 2: PLANNING

- STEPS WE WILL TAKE: \_\_\_\_\_
- MATERIALS WE NEED: \_\_\_\_\_
- WHO WILL DO WHAT? \_\_\_\_\_



# Service Learning Project

Theme: Discouraging Polythene Bags in Village Communities

## STEP 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- AWARENESS SESSION / POSTERS / STREET PLAY / ROLE PLAY
- ECO-FRIENDLY BAG DEMONSTRATION
- OTHER STRATEGIES: \_\_\_\_\_



# Service Learning Project

Theme: Discouraging Polythene Bags in Village Communities

## STEP 4: IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- TASK
- PERSON RESPONSIBLE
- DATE
- STATUS





# Service Learning Project

Theme: Discouraging Polythene Bags in Village Communities

## STEP 6: REFLECTION

- MY STRONGEST CONTRIBUTION WAS: \_\_\_\_\_
- I LEARNED THAT: \_\_\_\_\_
- NEXT TIME, I WILL IMPROVE BY: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**  
**Rubric: Service-Learning Project – Discouragement of Polythene Bags**

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Fair (2)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (3)</b>	<b>Good (4)</b>	<b>Excellent (5)</b>
<b>Planning &amp; Preparation</b>	No clear plan, unorganized and doesn't give the information.	Gives very little information about the session.	General information is given.	Specific and Clear plan with relevant strategies.	Detailed information is given to gain reader's interest and is coherent with the summary and practical strategies.
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Lacks community involvement.	Very limited effort to involve the community.	Some community participation but low impact.	Active engagement with the community and good participation.	Strong, meaningful engagement and community highly involved.
<b>Creativity &amp; Strategies Used</b>	Lacks creativity and repetitive or missing strategies.	Few strategies generally written and does not provide clarity.	Some creative elements but limited variety.	Several creative and effective and engaging strategies used.	Highly creative, innovative, and impactful methods applied. It appears to be interactive.
<b>Teamwork &amp; Collaboration</b>	No teamwork, individual effort only.	Minimal teamwork, poor coordination.	Some teamwork, but uneven participation.	Good teamwork, most members actively contributed.	Excellent collaboration, tasks shared fairly, strong support.
<b>Implementation &amp; Execution</b>	Project not executed, incomplete or ineffective.	Poorly executed, lacked organization.	Project completed with limited effectiveness.	Well-executed, mostly organized with some challenges.	Smooth, impactful execution; activities very well-organized.
<b>Impact &amp; Reflection</b>	No community impact, no reflection done.	Very little impact, weak reflection.	Some evidence of impact, basic reflection.	Clear impact on community, thoughtful reflection.	Strong evidence of community change, deep and critical reflection.

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