Developing scriptural agency through participatory action research embedded in service learning

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Abstract: The paper reports on students at an Islamic higher education institute in South Africa who were enrolled in a service learning module to see whether this led to augmentation in their agency. In the service learning (SL) module, the students were tasked with using community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) which enabled them to make reflective decisions which is the basis of their augmented agency. The research method was a self-study case study. Implications for religious institutions is that they are encouraged to include service learning in their curriculum. The implication for students is that learning faith is about living the faith in context. Lecturers need to shift their pedagogy and teach the faith in an applied manner beyond traditional rote learning. Pedagogic insights included the important role of self-reflection and the activation of student agency through community engagement. Students found participating with community members empowering. Students enjoyed the experience and found the opportunity to transfer scripture into service learning invaluable. They realised their ability to make a change, lived their scripture, and the community benefited from this.
Keywords:
Islam; Participatory Action Research; Scriptural Agency; Service Learning;

*Abstrak: Artikel ini menjelaskan tentang mahasiswa di sebuah lembaga pendidikan tinggi keislaman di Afrika Selatan yang mengikuti modul pembelajaran pengabdian untuk melihat apakah hal ini dapat meningkatkan kepemimpinan mereka. Dalam modul pembelajaran pengabdian/service learning (SL), para mahasiswa ditugaskan untuk menggunakan penelitian tindakan partisipatif berbasis masyarakat (CBPAR) yang memungkinkan mereka untuk membuat keputusan reflektif yang merupakan dasar bagi peningkatan kepemimpinan mereka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah studi kasus belajar mandiri. Implikasi riset ini bagi lembaga keagamaan adalah bahwa mereka didorong untuk memasukkan pembelajaran pengabdian dalam kurikulum mereka. Implikasi bagi mahasiswa adalah belajar tentang iman berarti bagaimana mengamalkan iman dalam keseharian. Para dosen perlu mengubah pengajaran mereka dan mengajarkan iman dengan cara yang lebih dari sekadar hafalan. Wawasan pedagogis termasuk peran penting dari refleksi diri dan aktivasi kepemimpinan mahasiswa melalui keterlibatan masyarakat. Para mahasiswa merasa bahwa berpartisipasi dengan anggota masyarakat sangat memberdayakan. Mereka menikmati pengalaman ini dan menemukan bahwa kesempatan untuk mengamalkan kitab sucinya ke dalam pembelajaran pengabdian sangat berharga. Mereka menyadari kemampuan mereka untuk membuat perubahan, menghayati kitab suci, dan masyarakat mendapat manfaat dari hal ini.
Kata Kunci:
Agensi Kitab Suci; Islam; Pembelajaran Layanan; Penelitian Tindakan Partisipatif*

INTRODUCTION

The proposition that this paper aims to explore and affirm is that religious students' scriptural agency can be developed through embedding community based participatory action research (CBPAR) within a service learning module. Further we argue that this intervention helps students apply their scriptural knowledge and create positive change in their communities. The novelty of this research is that it reports on the introduction of a service learning (SL) module to augment student agency into the curriculum of a religious studies program, which is traditionally classroom-based.

The primary focus in many traditional schools and Islamic studies institutes is scriptural content and theory. Current research laments this and calls for activating students' agency in their learning (Suddahazai, 2023). Similarly, the faculty at a private institute of higher education offering full time programs in Islamic Studies and Arabic where this research was conducted, identified a problem: the gap between the knowledge that was taught and the lived experiences of individual students. Furthermore, a gap was identified in that students were learning and studying for personal enrichment and were struggling to translate this into positive contributions to their community. Students were not able to see how to go about intervening within their communities and harness their agency and potential for active positive change.

The call for increasing student agency can also be derived from the work of Abduh and Taqwa (2022:24), who ask that teachers "develop several models or varied learning methods to increase students' learning motivation". A service learning module was added so that students could have an opportunity, with support, to engage with real world problems and put into practice what they were learning. While religious education, and specifically Islamic religious education, does in fact deal with social justice, the practical implementation of social change and community upliftment is lacking. Furthermore, religious clerics are often absorbed into existing structures, without being taught how to challenge the status quo, think critically, and develop new processes and strategies (Suddahazai, 2023).

The research site is an institute that primarily attracts young South African Muslim adults between the ages of 18 and 30. Students come from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and very often begin their Islamic studies with an elementary level baseline knowledge of their practised faith. Approximately eighty percent of students come from households that face financial difficulties and are reliant on the support of a student tuition bursary fund.

The Community-based Participatory Action Research and Service Learning (CBPAR-SL) was introduced as a pilot elective module in 2021. The purpose of the module was to develop student agency and social responsiveness through action research within service learning to help students apply their scriptural knowledge and create positive change.

Theoretical framing

The theoretical framing for this study is David Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycles theory. Kolb (1984: 9) states, "Learning is a process, in which knowledge is created through transformation of experience." The model asserts that the most effective learning is where the student undergoes four different learning phases: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation.

We combined Kolb's theory (1984) with insights from action research. The action research model was adapted from Stringer (1996) and Calhoun (1994). Action research cycles align with the experiential learning cycles. Koshy et al. (2010:4) explain: "the purpose of action research is to learn through action that then leads on to personal or professional development." McMahon (1999) confirmed that there is an overlap between the reflection in action research and Kolb's reflective observation. Combining Kolb's theory (1984) and action research provides a robust theoretical framework. This framework guided the module preparation and the research study.

Literature review

South African universities have been called upon to include community services as the third pillar of higher education in the post-apartheid era. Salaam et al. (2019) assert that there is a lack of research on the role of service learning within higher education. In terms of defining service learning, Halberstadt, Timm, Kraus and Gundolf (2019, p.1926-1927) define "SL formats as those kinds of modules or seminars designed to teach students about topics stipulated in the curricula while using community service settings." Thus, service learning is a community engagement pedagogy that combines learning goals and community service with the intent to enrich both student educational achievement and the common good. The idea is that SL has two key components: it involves a learning experience, and it involves providing a service or benefit to a community of people outside of the classroom (Matthews, 2017; Dapena et al., 2022). Fullerton et al. (2015) explain that service learning practitioners use engagement with community partners to impact their students in transformative ways. Their programmatic decisions and pedagogical practices are based on this intention. They further explain that college students who engaged in service learning during their studies were more likely to engage in community service after graduating. Graduates explained that service learning helped them develop leadership, communication, and teamwork skills (Fullerton et al., 2015).

Johannisson and Hiete (2021) add that service learning motivated students much more than achieving good grades. This indicates that the feeling of fulfilment derived from acts of service can serve as a springboard for greater acts of goodness and achievement. Fullerton et al. (2015) observes that years after graduation, students enrolled in service learning programmes can identify and describe specific experiences of personal value, and that can correlate this to their

approach to life in later years, especially with regards to human interaction. This, they explain, indicates the learning experience was powerful, and that it was a foundation that is built on in later years.

Higher education within South Africa has been called to lead social responsiveness. This experiential reflective approach to learning is being recognised as key in the transformation of education within the global south.

RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology of the paper is a self-study case study since the authors were involved in the design and teaching of the SL module. On the other hand the approach in the SL module was that students had to use community-based participatory action research. There was an overlap between the two. The self-study case study methodology is easily understood as the reflective phase of the action research cycle.

The logic of self-study is to reflect on the first author's experience teaching a module where she used the CBPAR-SL learning approach. Preparing for the teaching meant that we had to be aware of the literature and ideas on CBPAR-SL. This research was done in preparation for the design of the module.

The purpose was to reflect and record the experiences to be used for further interventions and program development. The CBPAR-SL were the underlying logics for teaching and learning.

The second author contributed to the design of the CBPAR-SL and acted as a critical friend when the first author reflected on her experiences.

Researcher Positionality

Part of self-study is highlighting researcher positionality. The role and position of the researcher is often overlooked in research; however, it does influence the outcome of the research.

The first author's stance is formed by her community, faith, and social context. Having been born on the edge of apartheid and grown up in a post-apartheid democracy, her perspective on race, faith, activism, and social responsibility is shaped by this. She has drawn upon Sultana (2007) to be transparent about her positionality, while also recognising how it enables her research.

The second author's worldview and assumptions about research is that he ontologically believes in levels of existence, multiple sources of knowledge which is the basis of his epistemology and methodologically and favours transformative research. His worldview is influenced by commitment to his Islamic faith while acknowledging the influence of the academy (as a colonial institute) on his positionality. He subscribes to a multiplex approach (Senturk, 2021) to research.

Embedding action research into a service learning module

The institute approved the module and students in the first year of the BA in Islamic Studies program and the one-year Islamic Sciences program were enrolled in the CBPAR-SL module. The institute approved the research study

and students were recruited to participate in the research study. The students gave informed consent to be interviewed and participate. All ethical guidelines were adhered to.

During the orientation of this module, students were introduced to cause-and-effect mind maps, which may also be referred to as problem trees. Students were divided into groups, with each group allocated to a different social or community challenge (e.g., unemployment, climate change, poor access to health care). Students then had to come up with as many different causes, both direct and indirect, that resulted in the challenge they were discussing. Thereafter they identified possible social, economic, and cultural effects of this problem on the community and the broader country. This exercise broadened the view of students, allowing them to recognise that problems or challenges do not occur in isolation. Thereafter students reflected on whether addressing this problem formed part of their faith. They were taught an action research model (Fig 1). The action research model was adapted from Ernest Stringer's (1996) cycle of a "Look … Act … Think … Act" action research cycle and Emily Calhoun (1994) that uses a pentagon cycle with five phases: select area, collect data, organise data, analyse and interpret data and take action. The action research model used in this study aligns with Kolb's theory of experiential learning (1984).
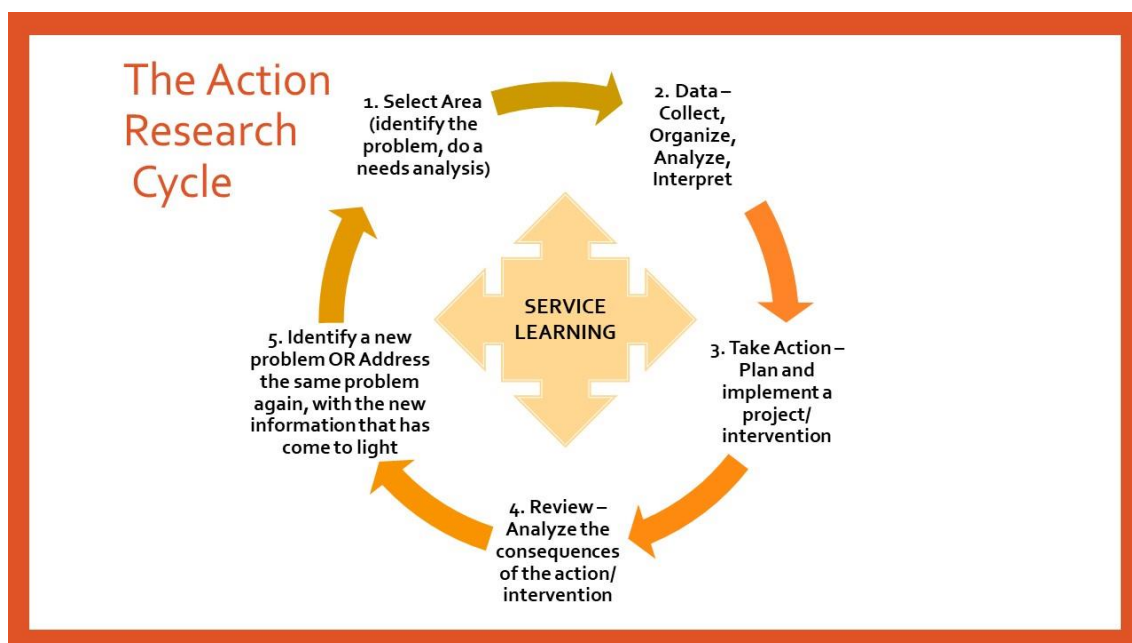

Figure 1: The Action Research Cycle

Islamic principles such as deriving insights from the foundations (*usul*), providing evidence (*dalīl*), and *taffakur* (reflection) were incorporated into the cycle (Fig 2).
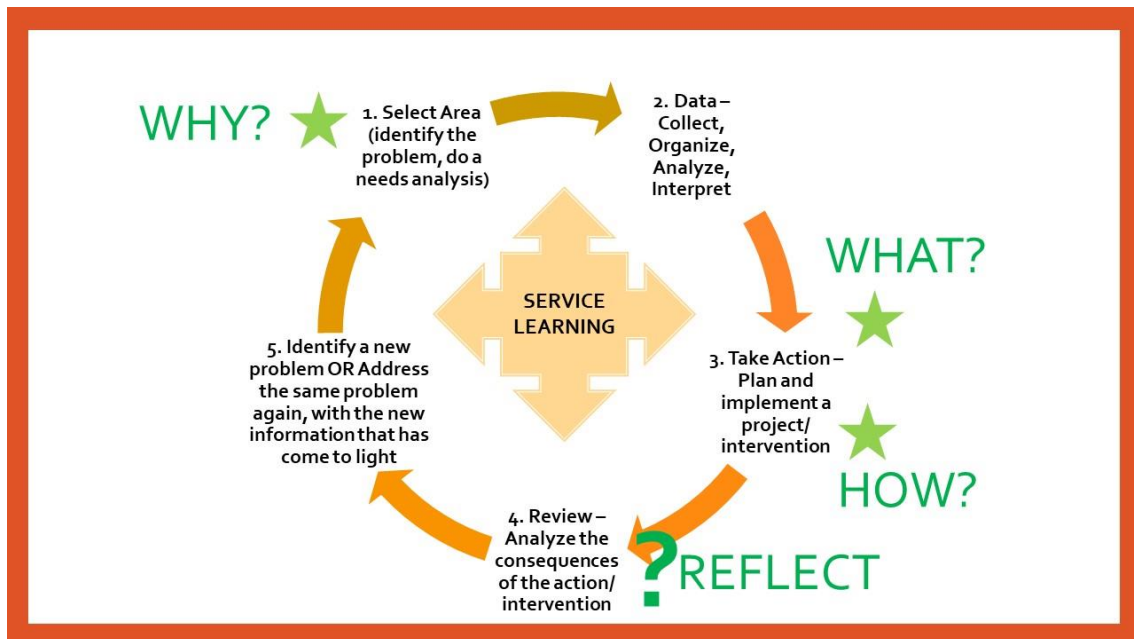
Figure 2: Action Research Cycle adapted with reflection points

Students were required to reflect on three key questions:
1. Why is it important to address this social issue or community problem?
2. What should we do to address this issue or problem?
3. How should the issue or problem be addressed?

At each stage, students were required to reflect on these questions and ensure that all their decisions and actions aligned with their faith. These reflections became interesting classroom discussions (Kolb, 1984). Experiential and reflective learning also serve as a platform for students to develop and exercise their agency. Theoretical scriptural knowledge is often the key focal point in Islamic education in traditional centres of learning. Many traditional classrooms are very teacher-centric, with the teacher sharing their views or opinions. These open forums allowed students to reflect on their ability to apply their scriptural knowledge and challenged their thinking. Often religion is viewed as dogmatic. By opening these platforms for reflection and discussion, students begin to recognise their decision-making power and agency. They also begin to understand their role as an individual within a community.

In terms of the progress through this cycle, it should have been completely student driven, with significant community participation and involvement. Due to the iterative nature of the program and the students being new to CBPAR-SL , the cycle was more facilitator driven. The implementation was also impacted by Covid-19 lockdowns and regulations which restricted movement and interaction.

The first level of research participants included students between 18 and 53. They were divided into 8 groups of 8-12 students (3 male groups and 5 female groups). These participants would be actively implementing the research cycle.

The participants were required to present their processes and projects to a panel. The second level includes the researchers, who facilitated the process with the students. The paper is written from the perspective of the researchers.

Each student group had to identify a social or community problem they wanted to address and complete a needs assessment as shown in Figure 3. Student groups had to do three presentations: identifying the problem, project plan, and project report. Students were provided with a rubric for each set of presentations. Presentations were assessed by two internal lecturers and two external guest assessors. The guest assessors were individuals who are experts in their fields. This interaction gave students the opportunity to engage with them and exposed them to different areas of academia, community projects and NGOs. Students were supported with access to a mentor and consultations.
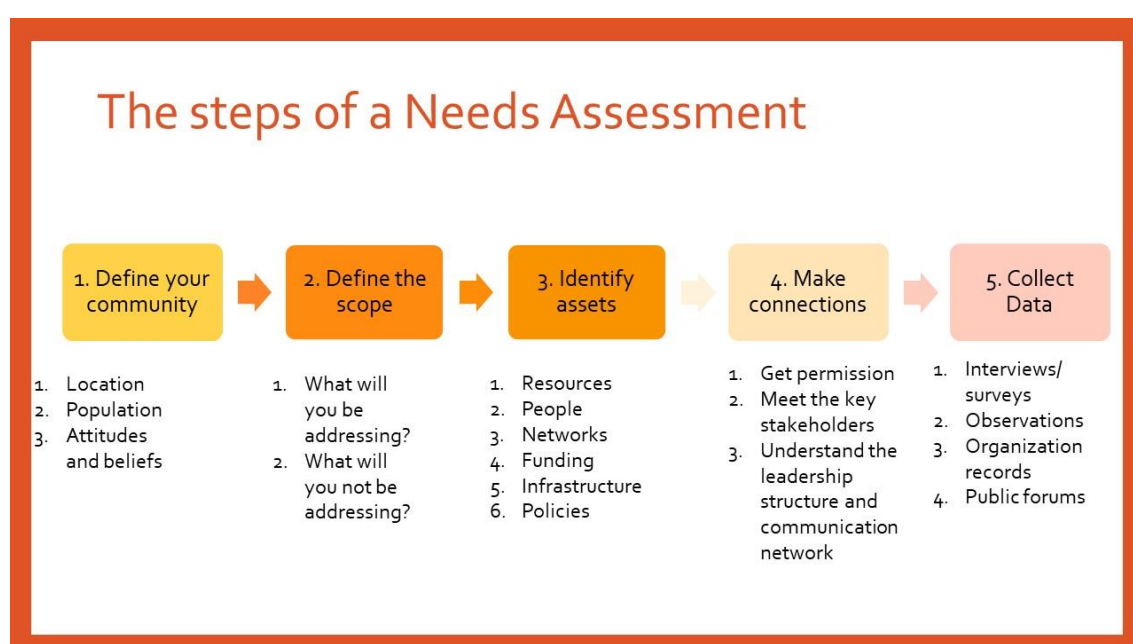
The steps of a Needs Assessment

1. Define your community	2. Define the scope	3. Identify assets	4. Make connections	5. Collect Data
1. Location 2. Population 3. Attitudes and beliefs	1. What will you be addressing? 2. What will you not be addressing?	1. Resources 2. People 3. Networks 4. Funding 5. Infrastructure 6. Policies	1. Get permission 2. Meet the key stakeholders 3. Understand the leadership structure and communication network	1. Interviews/ surveys 2. Observations 3. Organization records 4. Public forums

Figure 3: The steps of a needs assessment adapted from Waters (2020)

Several different needs assessment and analysis models were considered and evaluated. This model was chosen as it best fitted the outcomes we wanted to achieve. It addressed all the areas in a step-by-step manner, ideal for young adults who were previously not exposed to community needs assessments before. The assessment was drawn up with the intention to affect political systems and environmental change.

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown regulations at the time, the final presentations were not able to take place as planned. An alternative assessment was developed, where students were given the opportunity to present their completed projects on a local community radio station. This was very successful, with positive feedback from community members and the radio station. It also served as a form of appreciation and acknowledgement for the students. Students were required to submit their presentations along with any photographs of their projects. Copies of their radio interviews were requested

from the radio station.

A description of the projects
Seven out of the eight groups successfully completed the module, executing their planned interventions.

The seven projects included:

'Big-sister' Mentorship-Sisterhood Program: This group chose a project aimed at supporting an orphanage due to the status of an orphan mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith (Prophetic traditions). They developed a mentorship-sisterhood programme to cultivate a supportive environment for orphaned girls at a children's home in Cape Town. The mentorship program included art activities, sports, games, Islamic studies, and singing Arabic poetry. The group raised funds to purchase a much-needed fridge and kettle for the children's home.

A new lens - A tutoring system for the students of Khayelitsha: This group initiated a tuition programme in the township community of Khwezi Park, Khayelitsha. The project was chosen due to the emphasis of education within Islam as well as the dire need within the township. The students supported older learners in the community to teach the younger ones and assist them with homework and studying. Their intention was that the homework tutoring project would run on a 'pay it forward' model, where those receiving the support would become the tutors in the future.

Movement: The aim of this project was to promote fitness and movement for the students and staff at the institute. The group included a qualified physiotherapist who did a workshop on movement and simple exercises one can do while seated. The group also organised a 2km walk for ladies which included some basic stretching exercises.

Job Readiness: The aim of this group was to run a workshop addressing the key skills required to apply for a job. These skills included interview skills, CV skills, and how to search for jobs.

Cleaning initiative at a mosque by the youth: The group identified that youth attendance was low at mosques due to Covid-19. They initiated a cleaning project at a mosque in Mitchells Plain. Local youth were encouraged to attend the mosque by partaking in the cleaning of the mosque.

Vygieskraal Community Clean-up: Providing the residents of Vygieskraal (an informal settlement) with a cleaner environment by addressing their dumping issue. This was done by organising a clean-up of the area whereby litter was picked up and disposed of.

Period Poverty: Period poverty refers to the lack of access to sanitary products and hygiene facilities experienced by girls. This group showed creativity and dedication to their cause and collected 1446 disposable sanitary pads for a community primary school and R11 451, which was used to purchase

115 reusable sanitary pad packs for a community high school.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected at two levels:

1. Researchers collected data to build, execute, monitor, and evaluate the pilot module.
2. Students collected data for their community projects.

Data was gathered via four research methods:

1. Students voluntarily completed a feedback questionnaire.
2. Students were interviewed on a community radio station. Permission was granted by the radio station and the students to use the data.
3. Permission was obtained from the institution to use the student presentation submissions as part of the research resources for this case study.
4. Self-reflection journal by the first author.

For the student presentations, they were given a rubric to guide them through the different stages of the action research cycle. The rubric covered the content and the actual presentation. The key areas were clearly represented, and all requirements were included.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Scriptural agency lies in making decisions on how you take the Islamic instruction and how you go into the community to actualise and realize the principles that were learnt. The reflective decision making cycle is the marker of the augmented scriptural agency. As the student engages with the scripture and real-world situations, and moves back and forth between the two, they find themselves empowered and confident to tackle community challenges from a faith-based position. The scriptural agency lies in the iterative reflective cycle that students go through, grappling with scriptural content and affecting the changes they want to see in the world.

Pedagogic Lessons Learnt

Davids and Waghid (2019) explain that *Ibadah*, an Arabic term meaning worship or acts of submission to God, can be defined as acts in which one renders oneself in service to God and humanity. This can be extended to any of God's creations, including animals, plants, and the environment. With acts of service being considered acts of worship, there is an emphasis in Islamic teachings to do good, contribute to society, and develop communities. An important aspect of being able to do good is to recognise one's own ability, and agency, to effect change and make a difference. As young Muslims begin to embrace and understand adulthood, they are beginning to mould their identity and integrate their faith into their day to day lives. Their learning and their reality need to speak to each other and come together so that these young people may thrive and grow. They also need to embrace their own self, and define their own purpose, learning to

use their talents, abilities, and skills to achieve success.

In interviews and surveys with the students, pedagogic lessons they had learnt were highlighted through their reflections and observations:

> "In the beginning I just saw this as another project, but as we continued to go forth with our goal, I realised that what we were doing really changed my perspective on certain things. It taught me patience and definitely made me understand the definition of perseverance. I am and will forever be thankful that we were given this task." (Female, Survey)

This student notes some of the many benefits of service learning, that success in real life situations requires patience, commitment, and dedication. The student shows she is formulating her own opinions and developing her own thought process. Her understanding of her own agency is developing. We argue that if she had not had this experience, she would not have learned these life lessons. It is through the experience of service learning, that she could reflect and grow. Her observations were supported by a second student:

> "It taught us resilience and perseverance, especially with all our challenges… it strengthened our bonds with each other" (Female, Mosque clean up)

An interesting point here that is also highlighted by the next quote is that agency is tied to relationships with others. Furthermore, what we saw emerging was that students provided each other with emotional support. Perhaps as an individual, effecting change in the real world would be more challenging but working in a group or community, with each other's support, serves as a support for self-belief, accelerating the development of individual agency. A third student explains that the opportunity allowed them to develop confidence within themselves, and also served as an opportunity for improved well-being:

> "I want to add about the confidence levels, this project required each one of us to come out of our shells… I really think this project has uplifted us in that manner" (Female, Movement)

Showing a similar insight, a fourth student commented on the team dynamics they had been exposed to:

> "The project allowed team members to build good relations with each other, we learnt so much about each other and built strong bonds. Through our project, we were able to spend time with each other beyond campus hours and spend our time together while simultaneously serving and doing good for others." (Female, Survey)

This comment reflects the importance of human connection and teamwork. Agency is often thought of as very much individual ability to act or effect change. With students working in groups, we observed an interesting dynamic, where individual agency and collective agency both played a role in the project's success. The teamwork aspect also allowed students to observe each other, and note the agency development within their peers, further growing their own agency.

This statement highlights a very important aspect of youth development. While many youths may have the cognitive and physical ability to effect change, they may lack the confidence and suitable opportunities and safe spaces to do so. This is once again linked to their understanding and perception of their own agency. Translation of ideas into actual projects requires students to be confident in their own abilities.

A fifth student identified communication and time management skills were among the many lessons learnt:

> "It has definitely taught me that I need to manage my time, communicating with group members… it helped me recognise that communication is especially important in group work… and everyone really does need to be on the same page." (Female, Mosque clean-up)

This statement highlights another key aspect of their agency. Youth need to be able to be given social spaces - which were provided by the service learning intervention- to communicate their thoughts and ideas in order to contribute and effect change.

The students were also asked to identify challenges within the module. One of the main areas of improvement was the size of the group. Most students felt that they would be able to achieve more in terms of their projects had the group consisted of fewer members. A student explained: "I felt that our group was too big as while this could be an advantage in terms of manpower and input of ideas from various viewpoints, we lacked the ability to control the group as a whole and scheduling was very difficult with everybody having different livelihoods and circumstances". Another student added: "Having such a big group also led to conflicts of ideas and it is quite difficult to sometimes manage that."

In terms of lessons related to teaching and the roll-out of the module, the researchers identified gaps in the use of the rubrics. In future modules, students will be taught how to use the rubric to guide their preparation. They will also be taught the value of the rubric. One of the challenges of a rubric is that it does not always accommodate creativity. This challenge could be addressed by including bonus marks. We also recommend that the institute uses rubrics and service learning in other modules as well. Another suggestion that came through strongly was for the module to run over more weeks to give students more time to plan and implement their projects. A student indicated that they felt they would have benefited from learning presentation skills and also if they had

engaged in more practical opportunities.

Peer assessment was included in the assessment in the hopes of exposing the students to the practical application of using a rubric. From this, we observed that many students could not be objective, did not have the maturity level to critique peers, and were concerned that their peers would be upset by the feedback. To protect their social interactions and relationships, the rubrics were not given to the presenting group. The group was given oral feedback which was disadvantageous. It prevented them from reflecting on their scoring and discussing their feedback as a group. In future modules, the first presentations should not be peer assessments, and more time will be allocated for in-class engagement. This will give the students the opportunity to see and understand that critique is not negative, even if the comments are uncomfortable or challenging. Peer assessments will then be included in later assessments.

Additional challenges that need to be addressed in future modules are equipping students with basic project management skills and supporting students to deal with group dynamics and interpersonal issues.

When reflecting on the group that did not succeed, we observed that they exhibited poor teamwork, lack of commitment (absenteeism, tardiness), poor communication skills, and lacked motivation. From a module facilitator perspective, we acknowledge and understand that this could have been impacted by the fact that the module is not credit bearing. It could also have been influenced by the fact that service learning is not supported by other modules and/or lecturers, with most of the faculty leaning towards traditional teaching methods. The rehabilitation and disciplinary action for poor conduct and poor performance at an institutional level could also be investigated and perhaps improved to support student success.

Students also expressed their dismay that their projects were impacted by Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns that were in place at the time of project implementation. They did however acknowledge that learning to be flexible, creative, and determined in unprecedented conditions was a great opportunity for personal growth and development.

Lessons related to student agency

From our observations as researchers, we believe that from the feedback we received, students felt an increase in being able to be active participants in the world. They felt a sense of accomplishment, having successfully completed their projects, and this was a motivational springboard for further community projects. The SL module encouraged students to be creative and innovative in their thinking and approach. They were given space to try new things and learn from their mistakes. This developed confidence within them, which was clearly seen in their final presentations, as well as their student yearbook.

Our observations are supported by the works of Johannisson and Hiete (2021) and Fullerton et al. (2015) who noted that students derived fulfillment

from acts of service and that the effect thereof was seen in later years. Within our context, we observed the link between the fulfillment and the awareness of God. Students were linking their success to their intention of attaining the pleasure of God.

Scriptural knowledge may be considered textual knowledge but has added dimensions of faith, love, and self-awareness, which are not tangible (Yayha et al. 2018). This is a key difference between worldly/conventional knowledge and scriptural knowledge.

The development, and transformation of the students can be seen from their reflections:

> "I have recently come into the *dīn* (religion) of Islam. So for me, I know that being a Muslim is all about community, it's all about brotherhood, sisterhood, compassion and sharing knowledge. It's this absolute unity, this big massive community that no matter where you come from… you are a Muslim and we share with each other. So one thing I learnt from this is…we all have knowledge in a certain capacity, and we all have something to share… it was such a beautiful experience, to talk to all the ladies and to see the happiness on their faces…" (Female, Movement).

This reflection highlights that young people feel a sense of community. We draw from this, that once one feels a sense of community, it makes one more inclined to care for, and act on behalf of that community. The student would have come across Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions about unity and brotherhood. In the above quote, we can see that she had actually experienced it. The action research project allowed the students to experience theories and concepts they learnt about in textbooks. Witnessing, observing, and actively participating became an opportunity for reflection. We observed the alignment with Kolb's Theory (1984), where concrete experiences were opportunities for deeper reflection. This experiential learning would only have been possible through action research and service learning.

A female student explained:

> "In a project like this it is important to recognise that it's not actually us that did all of this - we are just a means to helping people. The ultimate objective was not for this project or for a mark or for the recognition of it, but we hope to make a difference in these girls' lives…" (Female, Period Poverty).

From this, we observed that students were beginning to understand their role in their communities and claim their space as agents of the religion. Their agency allowed them to contribute, and they could see the impact of their actions,

Another student added:

"We are very grateful to have had this opportunity… the amount of growth we have gained from being forced to step out of comfort zones, I don't think we could have gotten it from any other assessments" (Female, Period Poverty)

This statement highlighted that students began to see their own transformation and embrace their agency, recognising that they have the ability to do great things. The students were pushed out of their comfort zone. The project provided the opportunity for this transformation.

Two transformative aspects of service learning are being given an opportunity to work with a community and being made aware of that community. The interaction between students and the community provides an opportunity to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity (Damons and Dunbar-Krige, 2020). This method is a shift from the traditional 'working for the community' to 'working with the community' (Damons and Dunbar-Krige, 2020).

We can see how this emerged from a conversation with two students who worked together to tackle an environmental issue within their community:

Student 1: "(We chose) a problem on our doorstep" (Male; Vygieskraal)
Student 2: "We saw this as a matter that must be dealt with… it affects so many people… we wanted to contribute." (Male; Vygieskraal)
Student 1: "There was definite interest from the community to help out and they acknowledge that it is an issue in the area, and they want to do something to help their community. So that was inspiring." (Male; Vygieskraal)

It wasn't just that the students identified the problem, it was that the community worked with them. This was supported by a student in a different group who explained:

"We listened to them, and we implemented what they (said) they needed." (Female, Mentorship)

This showed an understanding of their role as partners with their community by listening, and how their individual and collective agency could support their community to achieve success as described by the community.

A female student highlighted the need for the participation and involvement of the community that they were working with:

"We weren't only telling people 'This is what you need to do', we were doing it with them" (Female, Movement)

From this, we can see that the students understood that they needed to participate and be involved directly with the community to effect the changes they wanted to see. We noted the emergence of the understanding that they need to help others recognise their own agency too.

Two key themes emerged from this SL project: Pedagogic lessons and student agency. Pedagogic lessons included developing self-reflection, confidence, deeper thought processes, human connection, teamwork, time management, and communication skills. The student agency lessons included developing a sense of community, understanding one's role in the community, embracing transformation, and the recognition of the ability to effect change. Both types of lessons contributed to students' augmented agency in being able to transfer scripture to the real world.

CONCLUSION

This research provides evidence to make the claim that CBPAR-SL helps students develop their scriptural agency and understand their ability to positively impact their world. We conclude that learning Islamic scripture that goes beyond the classroom and into the community builds a bridge between Islamic scripture and student agency. Azlan, Amran, & Ishak (2020) confirm the natural affinity between the ethos of Islam as a religion of doing good and the objectives of a service learning approach. Islamic faith-based learning has an inherent strong focus on agency, change, and transformation. Based on our findings our recommendation is that all institutes of higher education offering Islamic studies programs should offer service learning modules and opportunities for community-based participatory action research and, or SL should form a component ofother modules. We also call on lecturers in Islamic studies higher institutes to incorporate pedagogical practices that in addition to rote learning and recall help students to develop the skills to contextualize Islamic scripture within modern contexts without losing their rootedness in scripture We also suggest that this CBPAR-SL model be considered across the curriculum beyond Islamic studies. We advocate that community projects should have a strong research basis to make lasting change within communities and as a platform for developing the agency of all involved.

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