

Immediate Impacts of Online Service-Learning Engagements on Partner Communities: A Mixed Methods Approach

Mark Anthony Abenir (✉ mabenir@ateneo.edu)

Development Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9417-7330>

Leslie A. Lopez

Development Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University

Lara Katrina T. Mendoza

Development Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University

Eugene G. Panlilio

Office for Social Concern and Community Involvement, Ateneo de Manila University

Research Article

Keywords: Online Service-Learning, Partner Communities, Immediate Impact, Mixed Methods, Philippines

Posted Date: April 11th, 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2796839/v1>

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Abstract

This study investigates the immediate impacts of online Service-Learning (SL) on partner communities in the Philippines, addressing a gap in existing literature focused on face-to-face (f2f) SL engagements. Using a mixed-method convergent design, it assesses benefits, drawbacks, and factors influencing the effectiveness of online SL. Data was collected from 66 key contacts across 36 community partner organizations (CPOs) of a comprehensive university using a survey questionnaire and 11 individual interviews. Results show that online SL projects generally support CPOs' missions, enhance resources, foster new knowledge, and yield positive outcomes. However, qualitative analysis reveals areas for improvement to make online SL more engaging and responsive to community needs. This research emphasizes the importance of examining the immediate impact of online SL, guiding best practices for implementation, and fostering effective online SL collaborations that can be adapted across various countries with similar contexts.

Introduction

Service-Learning (SL) integrates academic study with community service guided by reciprocal relations and systematic reflection (Abenir & Ma, 2020; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Online SL is a unique mode of service-learning that takes place in a completely online environment, enabling students to work with partner communities remotely using information and communication technology (ICT) platforms (Marcus et al., 2020; Waldner et al., 2012). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Online SL has become a necessary adaptation for higher educational institutions (HEIs) globally (Dapena et al., 2022; Schmidt, 2021). Although online SL has many benefits, such as increased accessibility and flexibility, its immediate impacts on partner communities are still not well understood. Immediate impacts refer to the instantaneous benefits or drawbacks that online SL projects have on the partner communities involved. These immediate impacts can include direct or short-term effects or changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, or practices of the community partner (Lau et al., 2021). In the development studies literature, they are equivalent to immediate outcomes which may serve as early indicators of longer-term effects and to help inform decisions about how to adjust or refine an intervention (Belcher & Palenberg, 2018).

In contrast, studies on the various impact of SL on partner communities in face-to-face (f2f) settings have been well documented, particularly in HEIs in the United States of America (USA), where SL originated (Kung & Liu, 2018; Ma & Chan, 2013). For instance, Driscoll et al. (1996) found that hosting SL students from Portland State University had a positive impact on community organizations' capacity to serve beneficiaries, improved social and economic benefits for the organizations, and provided new insights about program operations. In another study, Sandy & Holland (2006) investigated the impact of SL projects on 99 communities in California that partnered with eight HEIs in their area. Their study reported six benefits of SL projects to partner communities, including direct benefits from specific outcomes, volunteer work, staff and organizational development, improved management systems, strengthened links with different groups, and transformational knowledge generation. Recent studies by

Kindred (2020), Towey & Bernstein (2019), and Trager (2020) also support these findings among non-profit partner organizations of various HEIs in the USA.

In the Philippines, studies on the impact of SL on partner communities are limited, and most question the effectiveness of such programs due to project design flaws and lack of sustainability (Dela Cruz et al., 2013), student-centric and charity-driven approaches (Sampa, 2012), the inability to address the dire socio-economic conditions of partner communities (Miciano, 2006), and limited participation and voice of partner communities in project planning (Abenir, 2019). Recommendations have been made to address these issues, such as giving enough time for students to get to know partner communities and partnering with external agents of change for sustainability (Dela Cruz et al., 2013), implementing development-oriented SL projects (Sampa, 2012), addressing socio-economic factors affecting community participation in SL programs (Miciano, 2006), and strengthening social capital through community organizing to empower partner communities to take ownership of SL initiatives (Abenir, 2019). However, all of these studies were conducted in the context of f2f SL engagements. Thus, this research aims to address the gap in knowledge regarding the immediate impacts of online SL engagements on partner communities and investigates the enablers and barriers to their impact. It is crucial to understand these effects to create online SL programs that empower communities while reducing any drawbacks. As digital learning and remote collaboration become more common, it's increasingly important to understand the immediate impacts of online SL. This study can provide guidance for creating inclusive online SL programs that address community needs, which may potentially be adapted across various countries with similar contexts.

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure I, this research adopts the Conceptual Framework of Community Impacts Arising from Service-Learning developed by Lau & Snell (2020).

According to Lau & Snell (2020), community partner organizations (CPOs) and their beneficiaries are the direct and indirect recipients of service in SL projects. Through literature reviews and validation interviews with CPOs in Hong Kong and developing countries, three major domains of community impact have been identified for CPOs: (1) increasing their capacity level; (2) realizing their goals and values; and (3) attaining new knowledge and insights. For the end-beneficiaries, who are the clients of the CPOs, two major impact domains have been identified: needs fulfillment and enhancement of their quality of life.

In addition to being direct beneficiaries of SL, CPOs may also serve as intermediaries in conveying the community impacts of their end-beneficiaries. This framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the potential immediate impacts of SL on both CPOs and their beneficiaries. However, the framework might be criticized for oversimplifying intricate community dynamics and the multitude of factors that influence the outcomes of SL. This could result in failing to consider the complete spectrum of potential community impacts. To address this limitation, this study employed mixed methods to capture the

richness and nuance of the experiences and feedback from key community contact persons while simultaneously quantifying the immediate impacts of online SL projects.

Methods

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach with a convergent design, which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, and merging them to compare or combine the results (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The researchers of this study used this approach to investigate the immediate impacts of online SL engagements on partner communities of the Ateneo de Manila University (Ateneo) in the Philippines.

Ateneo was chosen as the research setting because of its longstanding commitment to maintaining community-university partnerships through SL initiatives. For instance, Ateneo has a long history of community involvement since the establishment of the Office for Social Concern and Involvement (OSCI) in 1975, which has been tasked with creating a positive impact among marginalized communities through SL across various academic disciplines (Ateneo de Manila University, 2013). Ateneo also pioneered the first SL course in the country, titled "Theory and Practice of Social Development," or Economics 177 in 1975 (Sescon & Tuaño, 2012), and is committed to using SL to enable students to be persons for and with others (Loyola Schools, Ateneo de Manila University, 2020). In the Ateneo, a comprehensive SL experience is facilitated by integrating SL courses taken by junior college students, such as the National Service Training Program (NSTP) 12 course named Bigkis, managed by formators or student affairs professionals, and the Social Science 13 (SocSc 13) course, titled "The Economy, Society, and Sustainable Development," taught by faculty members from the School of Social Sciences in the University.

For the quantitative part of the study, the target research respondents were key contact persons from CPOs who have SL engagements with Ateneo under the joint collaboration between Bigkis and SocSc 13 courses. For the qualitative part, a minimum of 10 key contact persons from various types of CPOs, such as government, non-government organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, people's organizations (POs), etc., were targeted as respondents. The inclusion-exclusion criteria for research respondents were clearly defined, which included completed SL engagements with Ateneo students under the joint Bigkis and SocSc 13 framework during the 2nd semester of the academic year 2021–2022.

To gather data, this study used online surveys via Google Forms for quantitative data and online in-depth interviews via Zoom for qualitative data. The Community Impact Feedback Questionnaire (CIFQ) and Community Organization Interview Questions (COIQ) were the two primary research instruments used. The CIFQ, developed by Lau & Snell (2021), is a standardized and reliable assessment tool designed to measure the perceived immediate community impact of an SL project across various dimensions, based on the Conceptual Framework of Community Impacts Arising from Service-Learning. The COIQ, on the other hand, which was adapted, pilot-tested, and modified from the study of Barrientos (2010), is designed to gather in-depth qualitative feedback on the immediate impact of SL projects on CPOs and complement the quantitative data gathered from the CIFQ. Both instruments have been translated into

Filipino for key informants of CPOs who prefer answering questions in Filipino. The Filipino translation of the CIFQ has undergone a validation process by a professional Filipino translator with expertise in questionnaire translation.

This study received ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Office. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their rights, and the procedures involved before being asked to participate. Online interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission. Subsequently, the qualitative data collected were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method (CCM) (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), while the quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, such as the median, to interpret Likert scale scores. Quotes from participants included in this study are English translations from the original Filipino. Ultimately, the study aimed to enhance understanding of the research problem by complementing quantitative results with qualitative findings.

Results

Demographic Profile of Research Participants

The quantitative part of the study involved 66 out of the targeted 74 key contact persons who responded to the online survey, representing 36 Ateneo CPOs. Of these respondents, 25% were from government organizations, such as government agencies and public schools, while the remaining 75% were from private organizations, such as NGOs, POs, faith-based organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises. More than half (56%) of the CPOs had prior SL partnerships with Ateneo before 2019, while the remaining 44% started SL partnerships with Ateneo at the start of SY 2020–2021.

The majority of online SL projects reported in the survey were direct services ($n = 44$), such as online training, tutorials, and workshops, followed by research services, such as needs assessments, community/organizational profiling, and feasibility studies ($n = 17$). Advocacy campaigns ($n = 15$) and indirect services, such as creating websites, videos, and educational materials, were also conducted ($n = 12$).

Survey respondents identified ICT upgrade and development ($n = 34$), educational support and assistance ($n = 26$), employment and livelihood development ($n = 23$), leadership and organizational development ($n = 21$), and health and wellness development ($n = 16$) as the top five needs addressed through online SL projects.

In the qualitative portion of the study, 11 participants were interviewed, consisting of 8 females and 3 males. 5 of the interviewees represented NGO partners, 2 represented government agency partners, 2 represented public school partners, and 2 represented PO partners.

The interviewees reported benefiting from various online SL projects, including computer and software literacy, digitization of business processes, establishment of a business accounting system, marketing and development of livelihood products, academic tutorials, production of educational materials and

resources, revision of financial literacy modules, community and/or organizational profiling, COVID-19 health education and mental health services, as well as production of advocacy videos, art activities, and website development.

Benefits To Partner Communities

The results of the quantitative analysis, presented in Part I of Table I, indicate that online SL projects have significantly contributed to furthering the CPOs' missions. The self-reported scores, ranging from 1 (lowest impact extent) to 10 (highest impact extent), indicate that these projects helped advance their organization's mission (N = 65, Mdn = 8.00), provided valuable outputs (N = 65, Mdn = 8.00), enhanced service quality (N = 65, Mdn = 8.00), and enabled a larger number of clients to be served (N = 65, Mdn = 8.00). Additionally, survey respondents reported that online SL projects very much helped promote their organization's image (N = 65, Mdn = 9.00). This is further supported by an interview respondent who stated that the projects raised their organization's ability and capacity:

"The support and help provided by the students are a great addition for us so what we couldn't handle, we were able to manage; what we found difficult, we were helped. That's why I think that's the big impact. Our ability is raised, our capacity is increased because of the help and support of the students and formators." (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #7)

Additionally, the results presented in Part II of Table I show that online SL projects greatly enhanced the resources of partner organizations. Specifically, these projects had, to a large extent, created economic benefits (N = 53, Mdn = 8.00), provided additional human resources (N = 53, Mdn = 8.00), been worth their effort (N = 59, Mdn = 8.00), and promoted a positive work culture (N = 58, Mdn = 8.00). The survey respondents also reported that these projects helped them greatly in expanding their network (N = 58, Mdn = 9.00). One interviewee reported that these projects saved production costs and helped expedite the video-making process necessary for their organization and the communities they serve:

"The three videos they made were very helpful: the AVP about COVID, the one about advocacy on violence against women and children, and the Church and Community Mobilization. If we were to make those ourselves, it would take quite a while to conceptualize and produce so it helped us to speed up the process. We saved on the production cost, hiring consultants, and content creators." (NGO Partner, Male Interview Respondent #2)

Online SL projects also helped organizations acquire knowledge, insights, ideas, and techniques (see Part III of Table I). Specifically, organizations were greatly inspired by new ideas and strategies (N = 65, Mdn = 9.00), they were stimulated them to review their work practices (N = 62, Mdn = 9.00), helped them acquire new knowledge from the university (N = 65, Mdn = 9.00), enabled them to gain new experiences (N = 65, Mdn = 9.00), and enhanced their work techniques (N = 61, Mdn = 9.00). An interview respondent expressed that because of the SL projects, their self-confidence grew and that they realized there is a big opportunity to compete and grow in the field of e-commerce:

"I was inspired; my self-confidence grew, knowing that we could keep up because before, it seemed like we could only sell to the [local] community. I realized that there is still a big opportunity to compete and grow in the field of e-commerce, especially since everything is mostly online now and there are a lot of orders, so our confidence grew. The belief among our colleagues grew." (PO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #9)

Furthermore, the quantitative findings indicate that online SL projects benefited the service recipients of CPOs (N = 61; Mdn = 8.00) and improved their well-being (N = 60; Mdn = 8.00) to a considerable extent (see Part IV of Table I). Additionally, qualitative findings suggest that online SL fostered serendipitous connections and relationships. One interviewee shared their experience on how online SL projects helped address the social and emotional needs of their service recipients, especially during the pandemic:

"Surely, the reason why they had the session was to also help our learners cope with the [COVID-19] pandemic. So, those are the things that became tangible for the kids because they were able to meet other people, not just within their homes or classrooms. They were able to meet other people who could be their friends and who could help them with new learnings such as the different ways of teaching done by the students." (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #4)

Finally, Part V of Table I reveals that survey respondents strongly agree that online SL projects have had a positive impact on their organizations (N = 66, Mdn = 9.00) and that they intend to continue their SL partnerships with Ateneo (N = 66, Mdn = 9.00). Furthermore, they very strongly agree that they will recommend collaborating in SL with Ateneo to other community organizations (N = 66, Mdn = 9.50). These findings are supported by an interviewee who expressed gratitude for Ateneo's trust in their community as a venue for learning and exchanging knowledge between students and the community.:

"I guess what I can say is that 'Maalab ang Talab ng Bigkis' (The Intense Impact of Bigkis) would be an appropriate title for us. From our partner organizations to our community partners, we are very thankful for the trust that Ateneo gave us to make our community a venue for learning and exchanging knowledge among the community and students, in terms of facilitating our community development work." (NGO Partner, Male Interview Respondent #2)

Table I.

Results of the Community Impact Feedback Questionnaire (CIFQ) for the 2nd Sem of SY 2021–2022

I. Achieving project goals to further the CPO's mission	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
1. Advanced organization's mission	65 (1)	8.00 (1.00)	6.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
2. Provided helpful outputs for the organization	65 (1)	8.00 (1.00)	2.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
3. Enhanced organization's service quality	65 (1)	8.00 (1.00)	5.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
4. Helped promote organization's image	65 (1)	9.00 (1.00)	5.00	10.00	Very Much
5. Enabled organization to serve more clients	65 (1)	8.00 (1.00)	2.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
II. Augmenting resources of the CPO	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
1. Created economic benefits for the organization	53 (13)	8.00 (2.00)	1.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
2. Provide extra human resources for the organization	53 (13)	8.00 (2.00)	5.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
3. Been worth the effort that the organization put into it	59 (7)	8.00 (1.00)	4.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
4. Helped promote positive work culture in the organization	58 (8)	8.00 (1.00)	4.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
5. Expanded the organization's network	58 (8)	9.00 (1.00)	1.00	10.00	Very Much
III. Acquiring knowledge, insights, ideas, and technique	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
1. Inspired the organization with new ideas, insights, and/or strategies	65 (1)	9.00 (1.00)	5.00	10.00	Very Much
2. Stimulated the organization to review work practices	62 (4)	9.00 (1.00)	5.00	10.00	Very Much
3. Transferred new knowledge from the university to the organization	65 (1)	9.00 (1.00)	4.00	10.00	Very Much
4. Enabled the organization to gain new experiences	65 (1)	9.00 (1.00)	6.00	10.00	Very Much
5. Helped enhanced the organization's work techniques	61 (5)	9.00 (1.00)	2.00	10.00	Very Much

Note. N stands for the total number of CIFQ respondents while NA refers to the total number of CIFQ respondents who found the item in the questionnaire not applicable in their situation. The Mdn refers to median scores while MAD refers to the median absolute deviation scores.

I. Achieving project goals to further the CPO's mission	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
IV. Impact for service recipients	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
1. Brought benefits to service recipients	61 (5)	8.00 (1.00)	1.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
2. Improved the well-being of service recipients	60 (6)	8.00 (1.00)	5.00	10.00	To A Much Extent
V. Overall Assessment	N (NA)	Mdn (MAD)	Min	Max	Interpretation
1. SL project created positive impact for the organization	66 (0)	9.00 (1.00)	1.00	10.00	Strongly Agree
2. SL project made the organization want to continue with SL partnerships in the future	66 (0)	9.00 (1.00)	1.00	10.00	Strongly Agree
3. Will recommend collaboration in SL to other community organizations	66 (0)	9.50 (0.50)	1.00	10.00	Very Strongly Agree
<i>Note.</i> N stands for the total number of CIFQ respondents while NA refers to the total number of CIFQ respondents who found the item in the questionnaire not applicable in their situation. The Mdn refers to median scores while MAD refers to the median absolute deviation scores.					

Enablers Of Optimal Online Service-learning Experience

A qualitative analysis of 11 interview transcripts identified four key enablers that ensure a positive online engagement experience for CPOs. The first enabler involves efficiently managing online engagement resources and schedules to optimize the experience for all stakeholders. This approach entails coordination between campus stakeholders and CPOs to ensure flexibility in choosing available times with reminders from Ateneo formators to avoid confusion. Participants appreciated this, as one interviewee emphasized the importance of being able to select a suitable time and receiving timely reminders:

"It's good. We are the ones who choose our available time. They didn't impose their own schedule on us by saying, "This is our schedule." They also ask us if we are available at a certain time, what time works for us. That's a good thing because they ask what is suitable for us. That's important for us. Sometimes, we are embarrassed because we gave the time but were the ones who were late or forgot. But they always remind us [about the meetings] so that we don't forget." (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #9)

The second enabler is establishing a clear and effective online communication to promote collaboration among formators/faculty, students, and partner communities. This involves actively seeking CPO feedback and collaboration while ensuring timely and clear communication in response to their queries that builds trust and facilitates a positive engagement experience. As evidence of this, one interview

respondent gave a positive rating for the Ateneo SL program's smooth transition, preparedness, and quick response to inquiries:

"If I were to rate the Bigkis students, faculty, and formators from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, it would be 10. With communications, as I have mentioned earlier, the transition was super smooth, and the formators seemed very ready. For the courses offered this semester, they were prepared with the number of needed learners and how many Ateneo students would handle those learners. Also, as I mentioned earlier, if there were any questions, they were answered within the week." (Public School Partner, Female Interview Respondent #1)

The third enabler focuses on creating an active and productive online learning environment by encouraging participation from all stakeholders. Active engagement from CPOs is critical, and they are encouraged to take on the role of external teachers and mentors for students during online interactions. According to one interviewee, this process can be highly rewarding as it offers hope and new perspectives, especially since the youth are the primary target beneficiaries of the program:

"But when you interact with the youth, right, it's like full of hope... I said even if we get one university in a year, we can meet some young people. Aside from giving hope, they also give a new perspective—because this is their generation, the ones you need to talk to. Of course, I hope that this will continue, that in these opportunities, out of 30 students or more, there will be at least one or two who will hold on to our advocacy when they graduate." (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #7)

The third enabler also highlights the importance of active involvement from formators/faculty members to promote engagement and students to organize interactive sessions for CPOs. One interviewee noted that their partnership with the students went well because it was easy to communicate with the students:

"Our partnership was good, our conversation with the students was nice, they were fun and engaging to talk to because they had games and icebreakers before the session started." (PO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #10)

Finally, the fourth key enabler for effective online engagement and participation is addressing the practical needs of CPOs. This includes efficiently fulfilling their needs and providing communication and/or food allowances to ensure their full engagement in online activities. One interviewee noted that OSCI goes beyond providing data allowance by offering a small meal allowance to their partners.

"We have exploratory conversations with the formators even before the orientation to establish connections and identify the needs of our community partners. We also consult with our community partners to ensure that scheduling our activities will not disrupt their household or work activities. If there is a need, we provide meal or data allowance from OSCI which is a big help for them." (NGO Partner, Male Interview Respondent #2)

Barriers And Drawbacks Of The Online Service-learning Experience

Although the median scores of the CIFQ survey are generally high, there are some items in Table I with extremely low scores of 1.00 such as the online SL's effect on creating economic benefits, expanding the organization's network, and providing benefits to service recipients. Other items with low scores include the positive impact of SL, the possibility of future partnerships, and recommending collaboration to other community organizations. While these scores may be considered outliers, it is valuable to investigate the reasons for such dissatisfaction. Consequently, a further qualitative analysis of 11 interview transcripts reveals various barriers that hinder effective and efficient online SL engagements.

One of the major hindrances was time management challenges that led to delays and difficulties in meeting expectations and deadlines. This consisted of bureaucratic delays from the CPO, a crowded workload and busy schedule of the CPO representatives, and also coordination delays by campus stakeholders. Moreover, the constrained schedule of engagement opportunities for CPOs and sporadic conflict in schedules between CPOs and students further exacerbated these challenges. An interviewee explained that this made communication difficult, and expressed they wanted some online SL engagement opportunities to be rescheduled:

"Of course there are workers who will attend and naturally there would be some challenges. They will ask, 'How can I go there?,' something like that. So those were some of the problems that we encountered. Maybe we didn't immediately realize that there were already set days [for the online SL engagement] but [turned out to be] in conflict with our immediate concerns. So maybe there are times [when I think], 'I hope it's not on that day; I hope it's moved to another week.'" (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #7)

Another significant obstacle was infrastructure and its attendant technical challenges, such as fluctuating internet connectivity, limited access to appropriate smart communication tools, inconsistent electrical power supply, and limited knowledge and skills in the use of ICT by the CPO. One interviewee attested to this, stating that the internet connection posed a challenge to their learners:

"The internet connection became more of a challenge for our learners than the Ateneo students. If I am not mistaken, our students would lose their connection every now and then because there were also learners who wanted to attend... There were also internet connection problems because of their location." [Public School Partner, Female Interview Respondent #1]

Additionally, barriers to effective participation were also observed, notably from the CPO, such as the lack of physical space to hold hybrid sessions, irregular attendance of target participants, and initial unease or concern. One interviewee shared how they were initially hesitant to participate as they felt shy due to being with *Atenistas* (the colloquial reference to students and alumni from Ateneo), and some of their older adult participants mentioned that they would rather not attend anymore:

"We were really shy at first because they said they were Atenistas. The seniors who were with us were really shy in the beginning. They said, 'Let's not join them because it's embarrassing... Let's not attend and just send the kids [from the community]. It's embarrassing for the Ateneo students because they're just going to be annoyed with us.'" (PO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #9)

The barriers faced by some CPOs led to drawbacks in their online SL engagement as evidenced by the low scores given by some survey respondents for certain items in Table I (ranging from 1.00 to 5.00) as shown in the minimum scores column. One of the challenges experienced by CPOs was the difficulty of effectively supervising and supporting students in online environments due to the large number of student groups. As one interviewee explained, this made it challenging to provide adequate support and feedback on student work:

"The thing is, it's difficult to check all the different groups with their different outputs and line of work. They also require different people from our end. So if one person is not available, they won't be able to receive comments from that person since they have a different job to do. Most of the time it goes through me but even I have work that needs to be prioritized." (Government Agency Partner, Male Interview Respondent #3)

Additionally, some CPOs expressed fear that they could not replicate the quality of lessons delivered by students to their service recipients:

"Sometimes I realize that your students are putting a lot of effort in the preparation which is, of course, like over preparing in the actual teaching because the teacher cannot do everything that they are doing. We [teachers] cannot always introduce the lesson or session with some fun activity. And we may not be able to do what they are doing about having a gimmick per lesson because it is more important on our part that we follow the structure and flow of the lesson." (Public School Partner, Female Interview Respondent #6)

Another significant drawback was the difficulty of establishing authentic relationships between CPOs and students. The online environment made it challenging to build such relationships due to differences in perspective and barriers to communication. Some CPOs perceived online engagement with students as insufficient for establishing authentic human relationships:

"I think, perhaps one of the challenges is because we're on Zoom... ideally, personal interaction is really important, right? It's very important that they can feel what our workers are experiencing, right? That's the extra challenge. There are times... even from the beginning, during orientation, it's difficult to reach out because some students don't turn on their cameras." (NGO Partner, Female Interview Respondent #7)

Moreover, CPOs also reported feeling unfulfilled in their role and questioning the value of online interactions. One mentioned that online engagement of students with CPOs seemed repetitive and not maximized for productive endeavors. This, coupled with the limitation of time for other equally important tasks, made CPOs feel unfulfilled in their role:

"In the three sessions that were conducted, the participants thought that it was a training or knowledge-sharing session. What happened on the first day of the first session was a whole interview... Then, during the second session, most of the time was consumed before the actual training session. Because,

honestly speaking, in the interview, the questions were just repeated over and over again.” (Government Agency Partner, Female Interview Respondent #11)

Discussion

Positive Immediate Impact of Online SL Projects on Partner Communities

The quantitative data analysis show that online SL projects have an immediate positive impact on partner communities. They contribute significantly to partner organizations' missions, enhance service quality, promote their image, and increase their ability to deliver services. Additionally, online SL projects enhance CPOs' resources by providing additional economic benefits, human resources, and promoting a positive work culture. Service recipients also benefit from online SL projects as they improve well-being and establish connections and relationships.

Overall, the respondents strongly agree that online SL projects have a positive impact on their organizations and that they want to retain their partnerships with Ateneo. They also recommend collaborating with Ateneo and other community organizations doing SL. These findings are consistent with the qualitative data that indicates how online SL projects raise CPOs' ability and capacity, help them gain new experiences, and enhance their work techniques. Furthermore, online sessions with service recipients help learners make new friends and learn new things. CPOs are grateful for the trust that Ateneo gives them to make their community a venue for learning and exchanging knowledge among the community members and students.

The findings of this study confirm the value and potential of online SL to benefit partner communities. Even though SL projects were done online, it is surprisingly consistent with other studies that have explored the community impacts of SL within the context of f2f engagements. For one, the research findings validate the conceptual framework of Lau et al. (2021) that divided the impacts of SL into two categories: those that affect the CPOs, the groups providing the service opportunities for the students; and those that affect the end-beneficiaries, who are the recipients of the service from the students. The key findings of the study were that SL had positive impacts on both CPOs and end-beneficiaries in terms of capacity building, organizational learning, networking, empowerment, social capital, and well-being. Another study is that of Matthews (2019) who explored how community partners experience SL in a South African university, finding that community partners appreciate the benefits and opportunities of SL, such as improving service delivery, developing skills, and building relationships. Matthews (2019) also highlighted that the community partners valued the SL partnerships and believed that the presence of students met a need in the community.

Facilitating Optimal Engagement In Online SI To Ensure Benefits For Partner Communities

This study explored four major enablers that optimize the online engagement experience for all stakeholders to ensure that online Service Learning (SL) engagements benefit not only students and faculty members but CPOs as well. The enablers include (1) managing online engagement resources and schedules efficiently; (2) establishing clear and effective online communication; (3) creating a dynamic and productive online learning environment; and (4) meeting the practical needs and requirements of CPOs.

The first enabler, managing online engagement resources and schedules efficiently by the campus stakeholders and the CPOs, is crucial for ensuring that online SL engagements are well-organized and well-coordinated. According to Faulconer (2021) and Waldner et al. (2012), online SL, or E-Service-Learning (ESL), requires careful planning and preparation of the online platforms, tools, and materials that will be used for the instruction and service to avoid potential conflicts, confusion, and frustration among the stakeholders. Moreover, by allowing the CPOs to choose their own time slots and providing them with regular reminders, the program demonstrates respect for their preferences and needs, as well as fosters a sense of commitment and accountability among them. This is consistent with studies which emphasize that online engagement programs should adopt a participatory and learner-centered approach that empowers the participants and enhances their motivation and engagement (Martin & Borup, 2022; Rajabalee & Santally, 2021). The research finding also implies that online engagement programs should be flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances and challenges posed by the online environment such as technical issues and conflict of schedules. This requires the campus stakeholders and the CPOs to be proactive and responsive in addressing any issues that may arise as well as communicating effectively with each other and with the participants to ensure a positive and productive online engagement experience (Dumlao, 2022).

The second enabler, clear and effective communication, is vital for promoting collaboration and trust among the stakeholders. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the importance of communication and collaboration in an online learning environment (de Nooijer et al., 2021; Johler, 2022). More specifically, according to Dumlao (2022), online SL relies heavily on communication to establish and maintain the relationships and expectations among the different stakeholders. Thus, frequent, timely feedback and evaluation are necessary to monitor and enhance the quality and impact of the online SL. By communicating clearly and effectively, online SL can foster mutual understanding, respect, and social justice through active stakeholder support (Derreth & Wear, 2021).

The third enabler, creating an energetic and productive online learning atmosphere, is crucial for promoting engagement and motivation among the stakeholders. Online SL can be challenging for some students and CPOs who may feel isolated, bored, or overwhelmed, which is a common experience in an online learning environment (Croft et al., 2010; Núñez & Cuisia-Villanueva, 2020). Therefore, to foster an environment that is lively, interactive, and meaningful (Dapena et al., 2022; Figuccio, 2020; Schmidt, 2021), online SL must utilize various online strategies, such as active and involved formators/faculty, engaging sessions for CPOs, and recorded sessions for asynchronous learning. By creating an energetic

and productive online learning atmosphere, online SL can increase the interest and involvement of the stakeholders.

Finally, the fourth enabler is catering to the practical needs and requirements of CPOs to facilitate their effective online engagement and meaningful participation. As stated by Derreth & Wear (2021), online SL aims to address the real-world issues and challenges faced by the CPOs and the communities they serve. Hence, the online service needs to be aligned with the CPOs' goals, expectations, and capacities. Conducting a thorough needs assessment, providing adequate training and support, and ensuring the relevance and sustainability of the online service are some ways to achieve this alignment (Derreth & Wear, 2021; Dumlao, 2022).

Barriers That Lead To Drawbacks In An Online Service-learning Engagement

This study further identified several barriers that impeded online Service-Learning (SL) engagements, including time management challenges, infrastructure and technical challenges, and barriers to effective participation. Bureaucratic delays, heavy workload, and coordination delays were found to be the main factors contributing to challenges in time management. Infrastructure and technical challenges included issues with internet connectivity, limited access to smart communication tools, inconsistent power supply, and limited ICT skills. Additionally, lack of physical space, irregular attendance, and unease or concern from the CPOs were identified as barriers to effective participation.

Some CPOs experienced drawbacks in their online SL engagements owing to the aforementioned barriers. One of the drawbacks was the difficulty in supervising and supporting large students groups effectively. CPOs also expressed their reservations about replicating the quality of lessons delivered by students to their service recipients. Additionally, the online environment made it challenging for students and CPOs to form authentic relationships due to differences in perspective and communication barriers. CPOs also reported feeling unfulfilled in their role and questioning the value of online interactions.

These barriers and drawbacks resonate well with the challenges faced with SL even in an f2f setting. For example, the study of Lau et al. (2021) identify some challenges and limitations of SL, such as mismatched expectations, insufficient communication, and lack of sustainability. Matthews (2019) also documented that community partners face challenges and limitations in SL partnerships such as power imbalances, communication gaps, unrealistic expectations, and lack of sustainability. Dumlao (2022) notes that technical difficulties, time constraints, cultural differences, and conflicting expectations are also issues encountered in online SL.

To overcome the barriers and drawbacks faced in online Service-Learning (SL), it is crucial to focus on the four key enablers identified in this study. Efficient management of online resources and schedules, clear and effective communication, a dynamic and productive learning environment, and meeting the practical needs of CPOs are all critical in facilitating effective online engagement. To further support CPOs, HEIs

could consider providing devices and internet access to those who lack resources or working with the community to establish physical spaces that can accommodate hybrid sessions (Lee, 2020). Additionally, incorporating more opportunities for online personal interaction and community-building activities into SL programs, such as virtual cultural exchanges and online social events, could help establish authentic relationships (Tian & Noel, 2020). By implementing these strategies, CPOs can overcome the challenges of online SL and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of such programs.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the immediate impact of online SL projects on partner communities in the context of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. The findings confirm that online SL projects have a positive immediate impact on partner communities, contributing significantly to their missions, service quality, image, and ability to deliver services. Furthermore, these projects enhance CPOs' resources by providing economic benefits, human resources, and promoting a positive work culture. Notably, service recipients also benefit from online SL projects as it boosts their well-being and make meaningful connections with others.

Despite the positive immediate impact, the study identifies several barriers that impede online SL engagements. These include time management challenges, infrastructure and technical challenges, and barriers to effective participation. These barriers can lead to drawbacks experienced by some CPOs, such as difficulty in supervising students, inability to establish authentic relationships, and feeling unfulfilled in their role. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the four key enablers identified in this study which promote collaboration, build trust, and ensure that online SL engagements benefit all stakeholders involved.

While the study provides insights into the immediate impact of online SL projects, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The study relies on self-reported data and interviews from a small sample of community partners and service recipients within Ateneo which may not be generalizable to the broader population of community stakeholders in the Philippines' online SL context. Furthermore, the study only covers the immediate impacts of online SL projects; future research should feature longitudinal studies to examine their long-term and sustainable effects. In a subsequent study, it would be beneficial to further determine if the identified barriers were the primary reasons for some CPOs assigning low scores, ranging from 1.00 to 5.00, to certain items in the CIFQ. Finally, this study only covers data from SL projects implemented between January and May 2022, so a follow-up study is strongly recommended to examine any trends, changes, or differences in the impact of online SL on partner communities over a longer period.

Despite these limitations, the study has implications for practice and policy in the field of online SL. It provides evidence-based guidance and suggestions for instructors, students, and partner communities involved in online SL projects, highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of online SL and offering strategies for overcoming drawbacks while maximizing benefits. The study also advocates for the recognition and support of online SL as valuable in fostering civic engagement, social responsibility, and

community development, especially in the digital age of the 21st century. Thus, the study calls for more collaboration and communication among online SL stakeholders, as well as more research and evaluation of online SL projects, to ensure optimal quality and effectiveness.

Declarations

Author Contributions:

Mark Anthony D. Abenir conceptualized the study, collected and analyzed data, and authored the manuscript. Leslie V. Advincula-Lopez and Lara Katrina T. Mendoza contributed to data interpretation, revised the manuscript, and provided critical feedback on the intellectual content. Eugene G. Panlilio assisted in shaping the study design, coordinating with partner communities, and collecting data.

Acknowledgments:

We would like to express our appreciation to the Ateneo Office for Social Concern and Involvement, along with its formators/student affairs professionals, for their invaluable assistance in data collection. We are also deeply grateful to the dedicated research assistants, Ryan Cezar Alcarde, Eala Julianne Nolasco, and Danielle Anne Requilman, for their meticulous attention to detail, diligent work in data collection, and unwavering support throughout the research process.

Funding and Ethical Approval:

This research was financially supported by the Ateneo University Research Council (URC) Big Project Grant (control number: URC 03 2022). In addition, this study received ethical approval from the Ateneo University Research Ethics Office (UREO) (protocol ID: AdMUREC_21_039).

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare that they have no competing interests, financial or otherwise, related to the current work.

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Figures

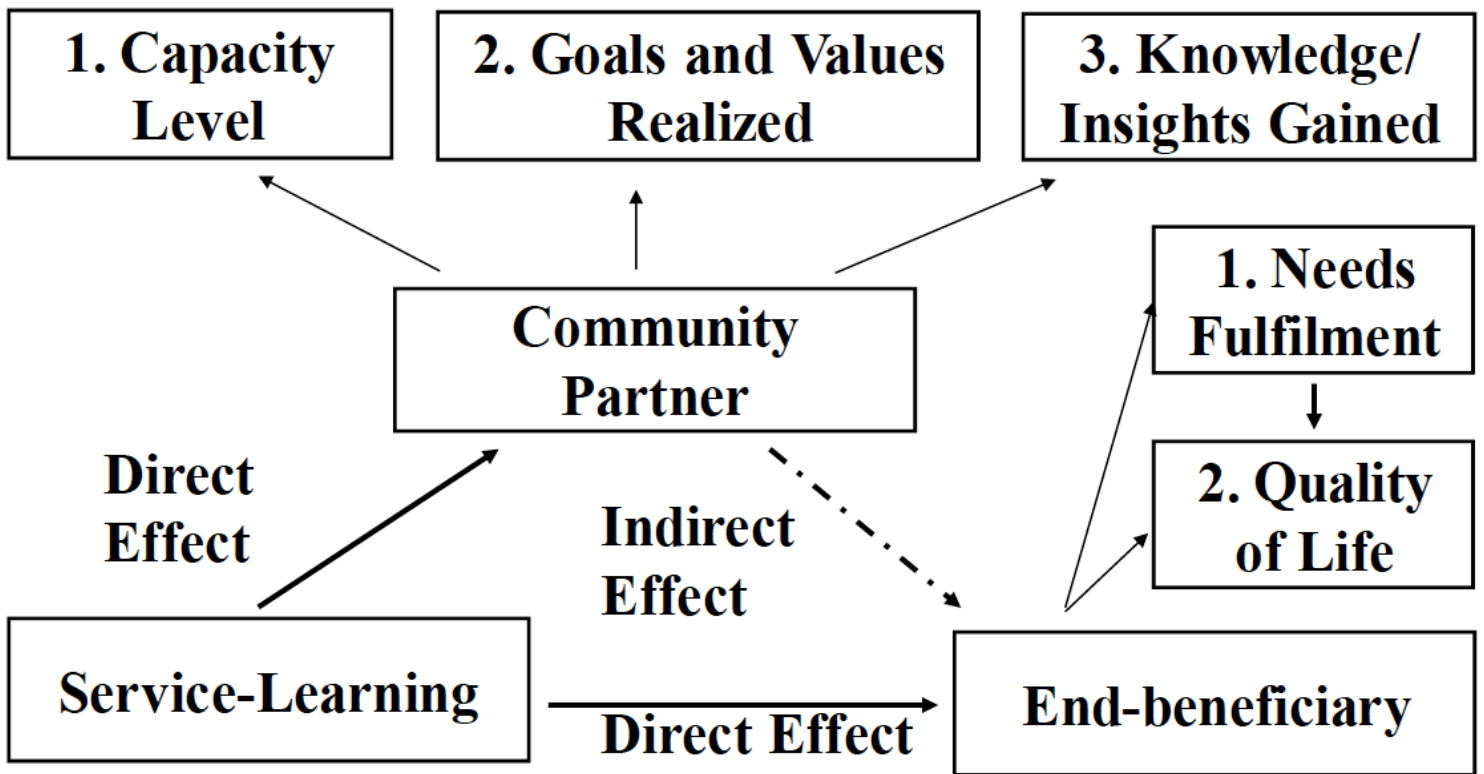


Figure 1

The Conceptual Framework of Community Impacts Arising from Service-Learning