Lecturers' preparedness for applying service-learning after intensive training

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how lecturers in European higher education institutions perceive the service-learning approach as a teaching concept and feel prepared for its implementation after a short-term training. Service-learning connects theory and practice by allowing students to participate in a service that meets community needs, reflect on this experience and gain an enhanced sense of civic engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – The evaluation study drew on data from four focus group discussions with $n = 21$ lecturers from five European countries following a Winter School on service-learning in 2020. The qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Findings – The findings indicate four themes of preparedness: (1) overall conceptions of service-learning, (2) continuum of preparedness for service-learning, (3) influential factors for preparedness and (d) transfer to home universities. The participants viewed themselves as multipliers for service-learning in their home universities; however, they were skeptical about being able to fully implement the service-learning approach after only one training and without a community of practice with lecturers with similar experiences in their home universities.

Originality/value – This study complements previous studies by adding a cross-national perspective of higher education lecturers. It underlines the importance of continuing training in didactics of university lecturers and a support network for the implementation of complex teaching concepts in higher education.

Keywords Service-learning, Didactics, Higher education, Teaching quality, Theory–practice, Continuing education

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The evidence base for the usefulness of the service-learning approach as a pedagogy in higher education has grown worldwide in recent years (Aramburuzabala *et al.*, 2019; Mergler *et al.*, 2017; Rutti *et al.*, 2016). Service-learning connects theory and practice by allowing students to participate in a service that meets community needs, reflect on this experience in class and gain an enhanced sense of civic engagement (Bringle *et al.*, 2006; Furco, 2009). Service-learning has a long tradition in English-speaking countries, Asia and South America. While Ireland, Spain and Germany have assumed pioneering roles in Europe (Resch *et al.*, 2020a; Aramburuzabala *et al.*, 2019), other European countries still lag behind in institutionalizing service-learning in higher education.

Service-learning connects university learning and community service (Furco, 2009), and thus contains both a "service" and a "learning" experience for students. It can include services in schools, public institutions or non-profit organizations. Service-learning is seen as a multi-

stakeholder practice between the higher education institution, the lecturer (higher education staff member with teaching responsibilities), faculty, students and community partners that brings benefits for all sides (Rutti *et al.*, 2016).

While there is a growing body of research into service-learning as a transformative pedagogy from the student perspective (Mergler *et al.*, 2017), fewer studies have looked at the topic from the perspective of lecturers, and we are not aware of any study to date that investigates it across different countries. Our study seeks to address this gap by focusing on precisely this perspective, which is "relatively invisible in the discourse of service learning" (Boland, 2014, p. 183) but highly relevant in guiding students professionally to deliver both the "service" and the "learning" components. Hence, connecting theory and practice is still a major challenge for higher education lecturers in many academic disciplines (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Tatebe, 2013).

Lecturers' preparedness for service-learning

Since the 1970s, studies have been focusing on lecturers' conceptions, beliefs and cognition (Kane *et al.*, 2002), which overall helped to shape the field of teaching quality and unfold the complexity of teaching. Cognition contains both subject knowledge and beliefs, while conceptions are tightly linked to practice (Pajares, 1992). By knowledge how to teach, we mean the factual propositions that inform skillful action (Kane *et al.*, 2002). Conceptions of lecturers, e.g. about the theory–practice gap, are generated in the daily teaching experience and then take the form of decisions and behaviors (Remesal, 2011). Griffiths, Gore and Ladwig (2006) report that beliefs and conceptions affect teaching practices even to a greater degree than teaching experience. Learning to teach service-learning is a complex and multidimensional process that depends on the ability to synthesize, integrate and apply knowledge from multiple sources in constructing an understanding of how to facilitate learning in a dynamic context in the community with a multiplicity of stakeholders who require attention.

Teacher preparation programs have repeatedly been criticized for being too fragmented, applying weak pedagogy or for the absence of organizing themes and clear goals (Hollins, 2011). Grossman *et al.* (2009) investigated how lecturers of different professions are prepared for professional practice and suggested three key concepts for understanding a pedagogy of practice through professional training: representations, decomposition and approximations of practice. Representations means making representations of practice available to novice lecturers. Decomposition stands for breaking representations down into parts for the purpose of learning, and approximations of practice means opportunities to engage in practices, which are more or less proximate to one's profession.

Lecturers in European universities are still insufficiently trained for applying the service-learning approach. Also, their conceptions and beliefs about service-learning are rarely researched. Many of them are as yet unfamiliar with the specific service-learning methodology, despite the fact that they teach subjects in which it would add value (Resch and Dima, 2021). As was indicated by Ellington (2000), "tertiary-level teachers are now expected to work to much higher standards than was the case in the past" (p. 311). This entails keeping didactic competencies up to date in all disciplines in further education and training.

While lecturer preparedness has been studied at length for pre-service teachers (Akdemir, 2019), inclusive education (Guardino, 2015; Kiely *et al.*, 2014) and teaching-specific subjects (Feder, 2015), this is not the case for higher education (Kane *et al.*, 2002). By lecturer preparedness, we mean the state of readiness that is achieved after a period of "readying" a lecturer for a change in coursework (Hay *et al.*, 2001, p. 214), e.g. through intensive training in how to apply the service-learning methodology. Such training is designed to ready lecturers to use a specific methodology that contains elements of theory and practical exercises.

Preparedness in this sense can be seen as paramount to their experiences and level of professional success.

Preparedness for teaching applied coursework is an important aspect of teaching quality (Kane *et al.*, 2002). This is influenced by a number of factors relating to their preparation, formal qualifications, continued and further learning, work environment and membership of a community of practice or practitioners. Empowering lecturers to meet the new expectations of higher education policy or quality assurance is oftentimes neglected (Hay *et al.*, 2001). Short learning formats like certificate courses, continuing education courses or summer/winter schools can serve to prepare lecturers for forms of coursework that did not feature in their initial training.

The Winter School on service-learning

This qualitative study fits within a larger European project – ENGAGE STUDENTS (2018–2021) – which sought to equip students and lecturers in Austria, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Portugal, and Lithuania with the skills required for service-learning. Enhancing skills of lecturers in service-learning is of relevance in terms of teaching quality and bridging the gap between theory and practice for all European countries, since research and practice in this field are yet starting to professionalize in Europe. Hence, training across countries is a useful tool, leading to a multiplicity of multipliers for service-learning in various institutions and countries. In this regard, a Winter School was held in Vienna, Austria, in February 2020, with lecturers from all the aforementioned countries. The Winter School was organized to address the following shortcomings:

(1) Inadequate knowledge, skills and training of lecturers in service-learning (five of the six countries, with Ireland being the exception);

(2) Lack of didactic and practical support for service-learning in higher education in Europe;

(3) Insufficient infrastructure and support for (formally) cooperating with community partners on behalf of higher education institutions; and

(4) Absence of communities of practice among lecturers in these institutions to learn from each other.

These factors lead to a mismatch of expectations and available support structures for preparing lecturers for service-learning. The Winter School aimed at increasing the visibility of the service-learning approach, teaching foundations of service-learning to lecturers new to this approach and engaging lecturers in planning or restructuring their own service-learning course. The applied methodologies contributed to teaching knowledge (Kane *et al.*, 2002), hoping to generate new decisions for applying service-learning for their future teaching (Remesal, 2011): a foundation session, five keynote sessions, two study group sessions in small groups, four interactive sessions in plenary, one technical session using a platform tool and a field trip to a service project. The five-day training included lectures by experts in service-learning, interactive exercises, the opportunity to exchange knowledge with other lecturers from across Europe, as well as comprehensive learning materials (foundation texts, examples of service-learning courses, mappings, etc.). In particular, they received a workbook (Resch and Knapp, 2020b), which was designed for lecturers to plan their own service-learning courses.

Following Grossman *et al.'s* concepts of representations, decomposition and approximations of practice (2009), the Winter School provided opportunities for representations in the foundation and keynote sessions as well as the interactive sessions.

Decomposition was made available by offering five distinct keynotes, which allowed lecturers to de-compose service-learning into its parts: service (e.g. identifying community needs, assuring the participation of students) and learning (e.g. reflection on practice, guidance counselling for students). Participants were able to experience approximations of practice in an organized field trip to a student-led service project during the Winter School. Practical knowledge in a field is developed as context-specific knowledge lecturers accumulate when engaging in first-hand experiences in practice (Kane *et al.*, 2002) – this was possible in the field trip.

Empirical study
Research question
The main aim of the study was to evaluate the Winter School and investigate the changed level of preparedness of lecturers after the training. The research question was: How do lecturers perceive service-learning after attending an intensive training course (Winter School), and how do they describe their level of preparedness to deliver service-learning courses after this training?

Data collection
This study aims to examine lecturers' perceptions of their preparedness to offer service-learning courses and draws on data from four qualitative focus group discussions with $n = 21$ lecturers immediately after the Winter School in February 2020. The focus group methodology allowed the researchers to collect the specific opinions of the respondents in a lowly structured form, allowing interaction between participants and thus contributing to a sense of being part of a community of practice, which is missing in this context. Each focus group discussion was led by a facilitator who was equipped with a discussion guide and an audio recording device on the last day of the Winter School. Four to seven participants discussed between 40 and 75 min. The groups can be classified as artificial groups as the study participants only met for the purpose of the Winter School. They were heterogeneous in terms of the countries of origin, faculty and discipline, and languages of the participants, but homogeneous in terms of their experience with service-learning (which was generally low in all groups). The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. All participants were informed verbally and in writing about the objectives of the focus group discussion and gave their written consent. Ten participants of the Winter School chose not to participate in the focus group discussions.

The discussion guide consisted of four sections: conceptions of service-learning, preparedness for service-learning after the Winter School, evaluation and usefulness of the Winter School and assessment of the training materials provided. The assessment of training materials served as an internal purpose and is not reported in the study.

Participants
The participants (15 females and six males, aged from mid-20s to late-50s) were lecturers from higher education institutions in five European countries: Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, and Austria. The focus group discussions thus included the perspectives of representatives of Dublin City University, Kaunas University of Technology, the University of Porto, the University Politehnica of Bucharest, and the University of Vienna. The range of perspectives included faculty from many different disciplines: power engineering, electronics, communication and information technology, economics and business, translation studies, linguistics, fine arts, architecture, education and teacher education. Some of the participants had experience in teaching methods similar to service-learning, but none had previously

named their course service-learning. Five of the participants also had other tasks at their universities, such as psychological counselling, career guidance or student engagement services. None of the participants previously had any formal training in service-learning.

Data analysis
The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which aims to find patterns of meaning in a dataset and fits questions that relate to people's experiences, views and perceptions. Thematic analysis is widely used across the social, behavioral and more applied sciences and is a theoretically flexible approach (Braun *et al.*, 2020). Thematic analysis offers techniques of data analysis without a predefined framework theory, thus being theoretically flexible but not atheoretical. It is well suited for analyzing large datasets and for working in teams (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). In addition, thematic analysis focuses on generating "themes" rather than "content" (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 40). The dataset was coded in several readings and coding phases by the researchers. In the first phase, we had to "familiarize ourselves with the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87) by reading and re-reading each transcript, noting down initial ideas and identifying topics. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by manual coding and then collating the extracts. The first and second authors separately coded the data, searching for explicit content of the data (semantic approach) rather than concentrating on the subtext that might underlie the data (latent approach), compared code lists and discussed them with the third author to reach a consensus on mismatches and to cluster codes into potential themes. In the third phase, themes were identified, discussed and defined using mind maps. In the fourth phase, the themes were refined after reviewing both the coded data extracts and the entire dataset again. Finally, this process resulted in four consistent themes that show how participants perceive service-learning and how prepared they feel to use it as a teaching method. To increase credibility and trustworthiness, we applied researcher triangulation in several sessions by first analyzing separately and then discussing the (preliminary) results together, outlining the relations between themes and, finally, reaching consensus within the team.

The four focus groups are referred to using the abbreviations FG1, FG2, FG3 and FG4. Quotations are chosen as they best represent a theme and are marked with abbreviations and the corresponding line number(s) in the transcript, e.g. (FG1, 377–382). The participants are represented with "P1," "P2," etc. Most of the participants and some of the facilitators were not native speakers of English, so the quotes might not be grammatically correct. There is an increasing trend in qualitative research to make reference to the language of data collection (Resch and Enzenhofer, 2018) rather than assuming that all study participants are fluent in the dominant research language. As in our case, study populations tend to be multi-lingual (Blommaert, 2010), a fact that requires attention in the data collection and data analysis process (Nurjannah *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, any quotes given below have been neither edited nor "polished."

Findings
The findings show that the study participants perceived service-learning to be a meaningful approach that has the potential to benefit both their teaching as well as their students, communities and universities. Thematic analysis revealed the following themes: (1) overall conceptions of service-learning, (2) continuum of preparedness for service-learning after the Winter School and (3) influential factors for preparedness. In terms of the overall evaluation of the Winter School, one theme was surprising, which is additionally reported here: (4) transfer to home universities.

Overall conceptions of service-learning
The statements made by the participants confirm that teaching knowledge on service-learning had generally increased by the end of the Winter School. They felt that service-learning aims to help students achieve their academic, civic and personal learning goals, that it is important to serve real community needs, and that reflection is essential. One participant stated: *"Service Learning could be a better approach on the long run to (…) open students' minds to the social needs of community"* (FG4, 232–237). Others emphasized the same advantages that service-learning was viewed as an approach that allows *"practical experiences for students in real situations outside the classroom"* (FG3, 86–87) and helps to *"get in touch with real situations not only theoretical books, in the library, in the university"* (FG3, 92–93). One lecturer emphasized the dichotomy of service-learning as learning in two different spaces, the community and the classroom, which he interpreted as an attractive approach for his own teaching:

> P1. The main idea, why I want to do it or I like to do [service-learning], is the whole possibility of contextualization the learning that students are having. So, it is different to learn something in the context of practice […] they learn everywhere, they learn in classroom, but they also learn there and they can look at the classroom differently, from a contextual perspective as well. (FG1, 127–132)

Despite this generally positive understanding of service-learning, after a week of intensive discussion about the principles and benefits of this approach, the lecturers also named disadvantages of the approach, such as a higher effort in course preparation. *"Most of the teachers do not have time to arrange agreements with companies, with communities"* (FG4, 74–75). They also questioned the suitability of the term "service." While used in the USA to refer to civic or community engagement, the term has slightly negative connotations for participants from some European countries, even English-speaking ones. They, therefore, raised concerns about cultural differences in service-learning terminology and the fact that colleagues and students at their home universities would oppose the approach for terminological reason:

> P6. […] the words of service-learning is actually quite unusual and it is not something that translates well into another languages and we were hardly to be able to explain that (FG1, 410–412).

> P5. [The] translation of this word into Lithuanian has negative meaning because it means you are like a servant. Yes. That is it, so if you will, if we translate directly, it is negative meaning and students that [they] do not to want to be servants (FG1, 429–432).

The participants suggested other terms like *"community-based"* (FG1, 1132) or *"cooperated-learning"* (FG1, 1140) to avoid negative reactions and discussions regarding the acceptance of the service-learning approach. When discussing this topic, the participants felt that it would be better to acknowledge such differences in meaning rather than to ignore them in a cross-country perspective. They suggested that future trainings and materials should provide *"a little more explanation"* (FG1, 1109) and make *"some references to terminology or cultural differences in terms"* (FG1, 1104–1105) as they see a need to find terms that are a cultural fit in their countries and language use.

Continuum of preparedness for service-learning after the Winter School
The study participants assessed the Winter School and the workbook as useful preparation tools. The keynote sessions with theoretical inputs and interactive sessions were considered to be well-balanced. Participants inspired each other: *"Colleagues from Romania and*

Portugal, they had many ideas and that inspired me a lot" (FG3, 319–320). While at the end of the Winter School, some participants felt well-equipped to implement service-learning courses in their own teaching, others, however, perceived it to have been an inspiring experience but did not feel as prepared as others to do so. This shows the gap between lecturer conceptions and pedagogical action, which did not take the form of decisions for all participants. One of the participants who felt ready to start with service-learning noted:

P1. Well, definitely I have all the necessary tools . . . and I have the necessary experience. I have some positive thoughts from all other colleagues. (. . .) So, yes, (. . .) I definitely feel, let's say prepared to engage in this endeavor but, as I said, I need a little bit time to digest and to put my thoughts together and to find the best solutions for my community needs (FG2, 465–472).

Another participant differentiated between preliminary teaching knowledge and internalized knowledge by acknowledging that she had much more to learn about this approach:

P2. After this week I have knowledge, initial knowledge, but to say that I am prepared to implement the service-learning method in my teaching, I would not say that. (. . .) I got not only the knowledge but I got the wish inside me, you know, to try this new, at least in some very small detail, this new method. So, I think that is a good start for learning more and more, maybe on my own, maybe from the toolkits you provided (FG2, 481–488).

Between these poles of "definitely being ready" and "being inspired, but not ready," some participants stated that they would like to use some of the components of service-learning to refine their own teaching, e.g. to strengthen the reflective or critical thinking parts in their own existing courses, but did not feel ready to offer a full service-learning course. *"There is an element of service-learning in some of my work" (FG1, 70)*.

Influential factors for preparedness
Two main factors influenced the appropriation of service-learning principles during the Winter School: the benchmarking of service-learning with similar and better-known teaching and learning approaches and the reflection on and discussion of their own teaching in peer groups.

First, since the participants came from different disciplines and had different levels of teaching knowledge about service-learning, they incorporated different opinions into the Winter School program. Including an interactive plenary session and a chapter in the workbook that compared service-learning with other applied teaching methods allowed them to identify their own positions toward these different approaches (i.e. community-based research, action research, volunteering). *"I was able to get to know a lot of information on not only service-learning but about other methods as well"* (FG2, 20–21). Comparing these methods with service-learning contributed to making the participants feel prepared for using the latter because it helped them to understand the characteristics of service-learning and connect them with their own prior knowledge and experiences with similar methods. *"For me actually, it was really what I wanted to look for, what are similarities and differences comparing different methods"* (FG2, 275–276).

P4. I felt the need to differentiate this methodology from the others. From volunteering or from internships and (. . .) this, this differentiation, conceptional differentiation in itself. For me, it was the most important thing (FG4, 1730–1736).

Second, given the many possibilities it offered for reflection and discussion with other lecturers, the participants described the Winter School itself as an essential move toward a

professional network or community of practitioners. One participant was downright surprised that he found this kind of training so useful:

P1. I found it useful and I never thought I would need training for what I do. Honestly, I mean my area before was also community intervention and so, as I was somewhat familiar with community intervention methods, I just relate to service-learning as one of them. But I found this context [the Winter School] very useful in fact to think about what I am doing (FG1, 179–183).

Another participant considered the Winter School and the break from the daily routine to be *"a space for people to reflect on their practice . . . and what they might do"* (FG1, 225–226). This particular setting allowed the participants to gradually familiarize themselves with the service-learning approach and learn about variations in such courses. One participant noticed a change in the sentiments of all participants in the Winter School toward the adoption of service-learning, one which, in her opinion, could not have been achieved to the same extent solely by reading a workbook:

P6. I think if you see the workbook on your desk and reading through it on your own or maybe with another colleague [. . .] you would say 'oh, that is too much to take on' but kind of working on it as a group [. . .] I think it has been positive, I mean you would not get that same atmosphere if you did not have something as physical training (FG1, 203–214).

Some lecturers feared that they would not be able to implement every aspect of service-learning perfectly in practice. However, they discovered how to use it in their teaching on the continuum of "definitely being ready" and "being inspired, but not ready." The Winter School with its many opportunities for sharing and joint reflection showed them that such courses can be delivered in different ways – and some participants felt that they were better prepared for service-learning by the end of the course.

Transfer to home universities
Most of the participants wanted to transfer (elements of) service-learning to their teaching. The Winter School and the workbook provided were seen thereby as useful starting points. The Winter School also brought them into contact with faculty from other universities. They perceived the opportunities it afforded for international discussion, exchange of knowledge and experiences, and learning from more experienced colleagues who had already established service-learning programs at their institutions to be the "*most useful elements*" (FG1, 163) of the Winter School. In general, the Winter School was viewed by the participants as a starting point for building a European network of support and exchange for service-learning. One participant suggested, for example, setting up an online forum so that they could support each other in implementing service-learning courses:

P1. I think there could be some sort of set-up, a forum or something like this, if we already have some engaged people in this group and, you know, different experiences here and a forum could be interesting. (. . .) this could be a little forum of support for those who find difficulties along the way in their courses (FG1, 1204–1212).

The study participants expressed a wish for a centralized point of support for service-learning, which they could continue to contact after the Winter School. They would welcome further such courses or conferences where experts could share experiences and course designs. *"We need to communicate with other people who are maybe having the same challenges and try to create the idea of possible practice"* (FG1, 196–199). One of the focus groups (FG3) in particular expressed interest in the possibility of establishing a mentoring or buddy system

that would connect novice and experienced service-learning lecturers over an extended period of time.

These needs were voiced in particular in connection with their concerns about implementing service-learning in their home universities, where it is still unknown in some cases and where hardly any implementation structures exist. The participants also spoke in this regard of their roles as future multipliers for service-learning in their institutions, a task that includes trying to convince students or colleagues of its benefits. Participants stated having different starting points in their home universities, which influenced the degree of transferability: *"We do not have a formal framework in my country for service-learning. So, I need to think a lot about my strategy and how to implement in my university"* (FG2, 502–504). The Winter School was a space of valuable mutual learning for them, and this experience led to their desire for more such opportunities for lecturer training, professional exchange and support in various forms, especially during the service-learning implementation phase in their home universities.

Discussion

This study sought to present and consider the service-learning approach as a multi-stakeholder practice from the specific perspective of lecturers in higher education, who were willing to discover the value of its application, and to evaluate their experiences of a corresponding training course (Winter School) in February 2020. The objective thereby was to shed light on the elements required to prepare lecturers for teaching and applying the service-learning approach in their home universities. With this, preparedness is seen as the outcome of a period of "readying" lecturers for change in their coursework (Hay *et al.*, 2001, p. 214) and contributing to teaching quality (Kane *et al.*, 2002). The study presented four main findings: (a) overall conceptions of service-learning, (b) continuum of preparedness for service-learning after the Winter School, (c) influential factors for preparedness and (d) transfer to home universities.

At the beginning of the Winter School, the participants had low knowledge how to teach service-learning, levels of awareness and skills for applying service-learning. The Winter School was, therefore, a valuable experience for them both as a further education measure and an opportunity to reflect on their conceptions in teaching in general. They particularly appreciated the exchange with peers, perhaps because continuing training in pedagogical–didactic competences at (European) level is not always available.

Following Grossman *et al.*'s concepts of representations, decomposition and approximations of teaching practice (2009), the methodologies applied contributed to teaching knowledge in the form of representations and decomposition most, while the element of approximations of practice was the weakest with only one field trip. However, practical knowledge in a field is developed as context-specific knowledge lecturers accumulate when engaging in first-hand experiences in practice (Kane *et al.*, 2002) – and this was made possible in the field trip.

The narratives of the participating lecturers show that it is a challenge not to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the approach. In addition, the training raised their awareness both of what it entails to integrate service-learning into higher education curricula and of the fact that working with this approach is complex and takes time (Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). Nonetheless, the findings show a considerable gap between lecturer conceptions and pedagogical action after the Winter School, which means that not all participants were able to make decisions after the intensive training. The Winter School was, thus, partly successful in generating new conceptions in lecturers for their future teaching, which may foster decisions in favor of applying service-learning (Remesal, 2011).

The institutional environment plays an influential role in teaching quality and lecturer professionalization as it affects the distribution of their tasks with respect to the relationship between research and teaching responsibilities in higher education. While a Winter School might be an efficient measure for training lecturers for future tasks, communities of practice in their institutions are needed to ensure the longevity and success of the training. The institutions will have to invest resources in professional networks for this purpose. Service-learning occurs at the intersection between research, teaching and administration for achieving an impact on society. This entails a hybrid form of support by both faculty and professional support units (e.g. centers for teaching and learning, transfer offices for community work). Transfer and support offices can play a key role thereby, e.g. by facilitating the process of exchanging materials and information about community partners for service-learning. Embedding service-learning into activities on a faculty level also requires lecturers to cooperate in this process. In this sense, we view service-learning as an element of further and continuing education in the organizational development and professionalization process for lecturers (Burke, 2002). Novice lecturers, in particular, might benefit from such services.

Exchange experiences with colleagues from across Europe was highly appreciated, in particular because teaching was long not acknowledged and valued in the same way as research activities in the careers of university lecturers. However, this situation has changed significantly – especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Didactic skills, especially in the digital arena, have now gained enormous importance. In this transition from analog campus to online spaces, the importance of e-service-learning has emerged (Waldner et al., 2012). Upcoming further education and training in service-learning will, therefore, have to take account of this new virtual reality, thus shifting service-learning activities from physical to online spaces.

The study described in this article is limited in scope as it only evaluated the experiences of the specific group of lecturers who took part in the Winter School in Vienna, in February 2020 that was organized as part of a European project. Training evaluations generally lack a longitudinal perspective as they do not measure effects after participants have returned to their home universities. Also, they do not take into account influential factors in the home university that affect the quality of teaching. The well-known Kirkpatrick model for evaluating trainings comprises the levels reaction, learning, behavior and impact (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2006). This study measured the reaction and learning level only. On the learning level, this means the ability of participants to perform the expected change, here learning to teach service-learning and actual behavior change and impact were not measured.

Implications for research and practice
Implications for research
Both lecturer beliefs and lecturer practices and the relationship between the two play a central role in teaching quality for service-learning. A follow-up study with the participants using in-depth interviews could add value to the results and provide additional insight into the effects of the training on lecturer knowledge and changed conceptions and beliefs about applied teaching. More transnational research is needed in Europe to combine efforts of single institutions to spread service-learning, thus creating communities of practice. The countries represented in this study have different national higher education policies, different implementation levels of educational reforms and different degrees of infiltration of new didactic approaches. This may affect the implementation of service-learning after the training. Future studies should investigate beliefs using mixed-method designs and observe teaching practices as well as using participant observation.

Practical implications

The recommendation to establish professional networks of lecturers who apply service-learning across Europe is one of the practical implications of this study. Higher education institutions might foster different forms of campus–community partnerships, which might not be self-evident, smooth or supported by higher education policy in all cases. Professional development and the quality of teaching can be enhanced by national, culture-specific networks: "Professional communities of practice provide a naturalistic cultural context for socialization into the profession and for teacher professional development" (Hollins, 2011, p. 402). In this case, cultural awareness is needed when entitling such a network, since in some countries or contexts, the notion of "service" does not have a positive connotation. When associated with the term "servant," the concept might be misunderstood as an unpaid service by students. Consequently, it might be helpful to integrate service-learning networks in existing networks for didactics or Third Sector activities. Similar trainings and the spread of open-access material on service-learning are encouraged. Networking can motivate lecturers to maintain and continue to develop their conceptions and beliefs of teaching by participating in a community of practice. Meetings can require participants to be prepared and knowledgeable, and to transfer their experiences to novice lecturers. This can again inform self-directed professional growth.

Conclusion

Lecturers who participate in trainings in the field of service-learning can become pioneers in their universities. The lecturers who participated in this study reported ambivalent levels of preparedness with regard to the transfer of knowledge from the training into their home universities. However, they did express the wish to receive further training to allow them to be able to fall back on a network of service-learning experts. The fact that service-learning closes the gap between theory and practice more than other applied teaching approaches has been widely researched and acknowledged and can serve as a valuable argument in the future for implementing service-learning across Europe and beyond.

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