



# Service-learning methodology in an integrated cost and marketing project

## *Metodología de aprendizaje-servicio en un proyecto integrado de costos y marketing*

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## Abstract

The training of competent professionals, with a vision and stamp of commitment to society, must go beyond traditional teaching processes, with innovation being a key factor. Service-learning (S-L) is a methodology that integrates teaching with the community service of students in a real environment. There are several challenges in implementing this active methodology, taking into account the stakeholders and the needs of the community. In this sense, this study seeks to describe the experience regarding the design, implementation and management of the service-learning methodology in an integrated project that includes two subjects, costs and marketing, in a business program at a state university of the south-central Chile. The work is based on the systematization of experience, based on three phases of implementation within the community: (1) planning, design and analysis, (2) delivery of the service and, (3) evaluation, reflection and monitoring of service-learning. The stages of design, implementation and management of a project of these characteristics could serve as a guide and guidance in future experiences by teachers or institutions that are interested in the innovation of teaching-learning processes.

**Keywords:** Service-learning, costs, educational management, university governance, implementation, marketing.

## Resumen

La formación de profesionales competentes, con visión y sello de compromiso con la sociedad, debe ir más allá de los procesos tradicionales de enseñanza, resultando entonces la innovación un factor clave. El aprendizaje-servicio (ApS) es una metodología que integra la enseñanza con el servicio comunitario de los estudiantes en un entorno real. Existen varios desafíos en la implementación de esta metodología activa, teniendo en cuenta las partes interesadas y las necesidades de la comunidad. En este sentido, este estudio busca describir la experiencia en cuanto al diseño, la implementación y la gestión de la metodología de aprendizaje-servicio en un proyecto integrado que contempla dos asignaturas, costos y marketing, en un programa de negocios en una universidad estatal del centro-sur de Chile. El trabajo se sustenta en la sistematización de experiencia, basada en tres fases de implementación dentro de la comunidad: (1) planificación, diseño y análisis, (2) entrega del servicio y, (3) evaluación, reflexión y monitoreo del aprendizaje-servicio. Las etapas de diseño, implementación y gestión de un proyecto de estas características podrían servir de guía y orientaciones en futuras experiencias por parte de los profesores o las instituciones que se encuentren interesados en la innovación de los procesos de la enseñanza-aprendizaje.

**Descriptores:** Aprendizaje-servicio, costos, gestión educativa, gobernanza universitaria, implementación, marketing.

## 1. Introduction

Organizations face a scenario characterized by profound social, political and economic changes, a phenomenon that has increased during the pandemic that the planet is facing, and which generates insecurities as uncertainty has increased and has forced the introduction of new models (Ganga-Contreras, 2013; Niño-González & Linares-Herrera, 2020).

It is evident that the generation, reproduction and transfer of knowledge moves at a significant speed in this complex and competitive world, driven by the profuse development of technologies (Ganga-Contreras et al., 2014; Ganga-Contreras et al., 2019a).

The reality described indicates the need of being increasingly innovative in the formation of professional profiles that the community needs, where university is inserted with innovative and multifaceted methodologies (Vidal-Raméntol & Fuertes-Camacho, 2013; Sánchez-Marín et al., 2019) and applicable to multiple types of students (Puebla-Martínez et al., 2018) for increasingly broad educational purposes (Domínguez, 2018; Rubio, 2018).

The business area does not escape this reality, and therefore professionals are also required to have a comprehensive training, with sensitivity and empathy in the environment they develop. In this context, new practices of citizenship are created, training citizens to be participatory, responsible, and committed to the common good (Pérez-Galván & Ochoa-Cervantes, 2017).

One teaching-learning methodology that achieves this purpose is service-learning (SL), which tries to connect the student to society in a real way (Guíñez-Cabrera et al., 2020). Thus, SL has positioned as a vocational education strategy, combining academic training and community service (Ganga-Contreras et al., 2019b). Therefore, training critical citizens means legitimizing an educational project that is committed to social transformation (Traver-Martí et al., 2019; Esteves-Fajardo et al., 2020).

As Barrientos-Báez (2016) points out, there are tools that make learning processes much more personalized and flexible, such as mobile learning (Alises-Camacho, 2017) and the concept of educommunication (Rodríguez-García, 2017). In this case, the SL methodology is an example of the advancement in learning styles and tools.

There are several definitions of SL, depending on the objective of the study to be achieved; it can be understood as a course-based educational experience, where students participate in organized service activities that meet the identified needs of the community (Orozco-Gómez et al., 2016).

The integration of community service with learning enriches course content, and it is evident that the benefits of SL can have a triple positive impact: Student, community and institution (Al Barwani et al., 2013).

SL experiences can offer business students an opportunity to find a sense of personal responsibility, interact with the real community, develop greater interpersonal, Intercultural and ethical skills (Simó-Algado et al., 2013; Carmona-Martínez et al., 2014) also experiencing the challenges that real projects regularly demand, such as time management, solution to the needs of community partners, and collaboration with peers (Seider et al., 2011; Stefaniak, 2015). In this way, Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2020) shows that the methodology of SL teaching influences and improves the academic commitment of university students, showing more positive attitudes in the study.

On the other hand, institutions benefit from SL —specifically business schools— because they can obtain contacts and contribute to the community by improving the image of social commitment, the link with the community and achievements through community services, and the mission of educating students as socially responsible people (Poon et al., 2011).

In turn, the community can benefit from this pedagogy, as companies have access to technical supports in specific business areas.



For this particular study, SL means a teaching-learning methodology based on one or more subjects in an academic program, which generates multiple benefits for all people involved. Although there is a growing interest in this methodology due to its important contributions, there is still no comprehensive implementation framework that can be used in any context as in an integrated two-subject project.

Considering the lack of implementation of this particular type of project, this study aims to describe the experience of designing, implementing and managing the methodology of SL in an integrated two-subject project (costs and marketing) in students coursing a business program at a public and state university in central-southern Chile.

This is done using the SL model proposed by Musa et al. (2017), which includes three phases: planning, design and analysis of SL; delivery of the SL service; and evaluation, reflection and monitoring of SL.

The results of this work could serve as a guide for other institutions and teachers who would like to implement SL and improve their teaching-learning processes through methodological innovation.

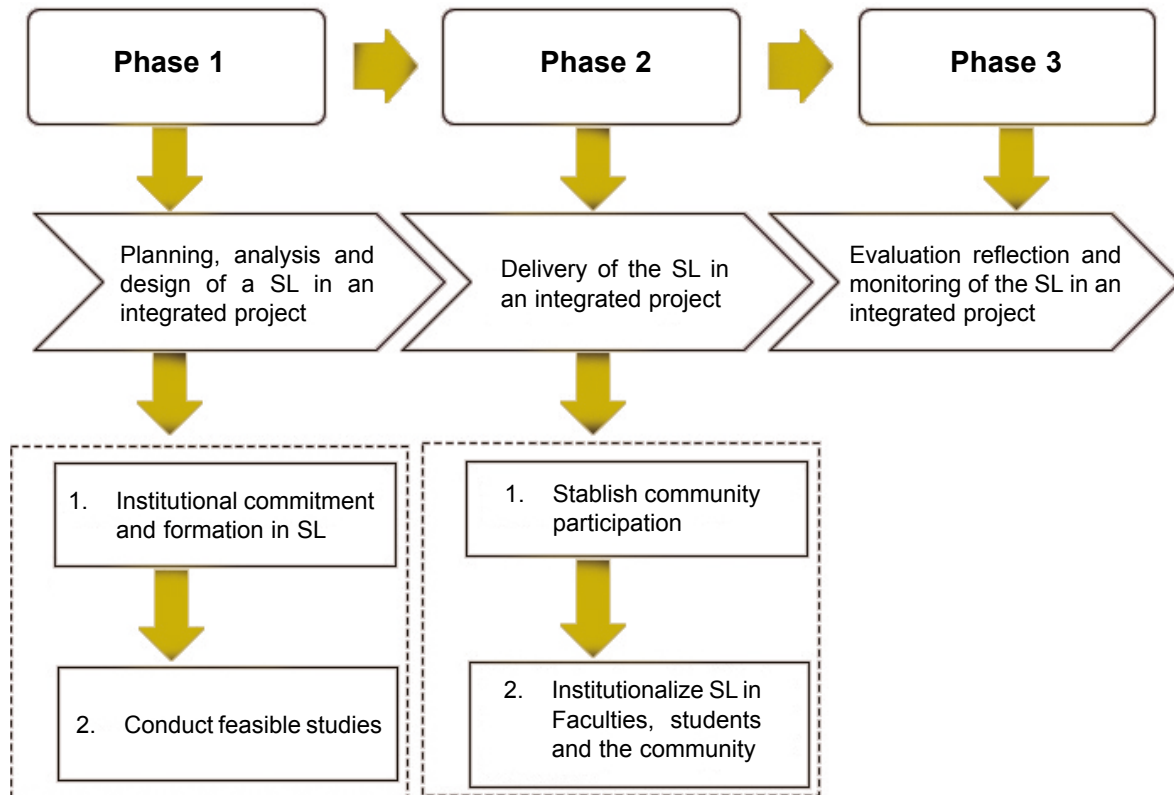
## 2. Learning-service methodology

Pizarro et al. (2015) show their implementation phases of the SL methodology, based on Tapia's postulates (2007), where the implementation of SL was in the cost foundation course conducted from three major phases: (1) search and classification of community partners, (2) implementation of the methodology, and (3) monitoring and evaluation. Petkus (2000) also developed a theoretical and practical framework for SL in marketing to guide the planning, implementation and evaluation of a SL course in marketing through Kolb experimental learning cycle model (1984).

This project integrated with SL includes two subjects and is based on the SL methodology model proposed by Musa et al. (2017), which is based on three implementation phases: (1) SL planning, design and analysis (it involves identifying and analyzing needs and opportunities to incorporate them into SL processes and activities), (2) SL service delivery (focusing more on the implementation of the integrated SL project that has two steps, establish community participation and institutionalize the SL in the faculty, students and community), (3) SL assessment, reflection and monitoring (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. A methodology for implementing SL in an integrated project.



Source: Own elaboration, based on Musa et al. 2017.

### 3. Proposal

#### 3.1. Phase 1: Planning, analysis and design of a SL in an integrated project

This phase involves identifying and analyzing opportunities and needs to incorporate them into SL processes and activities. Two steps are distinguished:

##### 3.1.1. Step 1: Institutional commitment and training of a SL program

Institutional support is essential to achieving good results in the implementation of the SL methodology (Guíñez-Cabrera et al., 2020). In turn, it is important for members of institutions to understand that SL is an effective process

for achieving academic goals that are valued by students and the community (Poon et al., 2011).

In the case of the University of Bío Bío (UBB), it has an institutional educational model since 2008 which focuses the action on the students, concerning about their personal and professional training, and seeking to achieve an integral development as individuals, professionals and citizens that allows to respond to the needs of the environment. In this model, the teaching-learning process is fundamentally active, where training is oriented toward achieving meaningful learning. A significant thematic focus is the commitment, which corresponds to professional, personal and social responsibility on the economic and social reality, favoring the development of social responsibility through the training of professionals who are committed to their community, with an integrative look at



real problems, ensuring solidarity development. Training and recycling are essential parts of an organization for an optimal professional development (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2019; Ongallo-Chanci6n & Gallego-Gil, 2020). Within the key learning components, the experiential context, procedural, theoretical concepts and the implementation of knowledge are considered (Modelo Educativo UBB, 2017).

On the other hand, Bringle and Hatcher (1996) suggest that during the first stage of planning, the interested faculty needs to be identified to develop SL and even form a program. The role of the faculty's SL program is to make recommendations of the SL requirements with respect to courses, students and the community, being a link between the faculty and the community (Musa et al., 2017).

The Faculty of Business Sciences (FACE) of the UBB has an Improvement Plan called: "Development of competences of students of the Faculty of Business Sciences, through the methodology Service Learning and the use of Information Technologies" (Programa Aprendizaje Servicio, 2017).

As known, institutions that are interested in SL should encourage teacher development activities to develop a common understanding of SL and increase confidence in the implementation of this pedagogy (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Without the support of the teacher participation, incorporating SL into the curricula will not be enough (Seifer & Connors, 2007).

The UBB has an area of pedagogical and technological development, and in turn a permanent program of university pedagogy by the curriculum management and monitoring unit, which provides training to teachers in various disciplines, among them is the active methodology of SL. The purpose of the FACE improvement plan is also to strengthen teacher learning and management based on real experiences (Programa Aprendizaje Servicio, 2017 Programa Aprendizaje Servicio, 2017).

### 3.1.2. Step 2: Carry out feasible studies

A feasible study is essential before implementing SL in the community (Musa et al., 2017). There are five types of feasible studies to be carried out in the implementation of SL; (1) Course Development, (2) SL Projects, (3) Operational, (4) Financial, and (5) Technical (Musa et al., 2017). The studies are described below.

#### 3.1.2.1. Course Development

The development of SL in higher education (ES) is primarily a work of professors (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Professors need to study how to integrate SL into the curriculum, which is based on requirements and the career direction. Course preparation is a crucial process in the implementation of SL, reviewing the remodeling of course content and learning objectives where SL objectives must take into account the requirements of students and the community (Musa et al., 2017).

The project needs to reflect the contents of the curriculum, community needs and reflection on SL activities (Gallgher et al., 1999). An explicit and mutual agreement on the objectives of SL between the faculty and the community must also be reached. The faculty also needs to study course requirements, instructions, activities, learning resources, and evaluations, in this case costs and marketing (Musa et al., 2017).

First, the people involved in the integrated project incorporated the competences of the generic university profile such as: Willingness to learn and entrepreneurial capacity (Mayer-Granados et al., 2019), leadership, collaborative work, communication capacity and social responsibility; competences that are promoted through the implementation of the SL methodology. According to Barrientos-Báez et al. (2019), the new teaching model provides a different way of understanding university and its relations with society. Autonomy is the main characteris-





tic that universities have to respond flexibly and rapidly to the changing needs.

The competences of the graduation profile were then reviewed to ensure that the implementation of this active methodology was consistent with the student's training.

Next, the respective courses (costs and marketing) were redesigned, reviewing the subject programs to ensure that the course outline met the content addressed by SL and the needs of community partners. In addition, the methodology of both subjects, the academic, conceptual and procedural contents, and the evaluation criteria were analyzed, making them consistent with the needs of community partners. The courses were appropriate and relevant to the community, because SL objectives emphasize how students in this business program can propose cost and marketing solutions to generate more opportunities for businesses in the area, based on the actual needs of the company code where they are inserted.

The respective academic load (working hours) of the students was also considered; this decision allowed the alignment between the specifications of the subjects in each program (costs and marketing), with respect to the weekly load, which corresponds to five hours of attendance and five hours of autonomous work weekly. With regard to the amount of time in the field work, this variable depended on the requirements of the community partners, but it was necessary to have at least one face-to-face meeting per week, which depended on the availability of the community partner and the level of progress of the team work, being considered as part of autonomous work.

The integrated project was rated with a grade on the scale from 1 to 7 and had a weight of 30% of the final grade in both cost and marketing subjects. Once the effectiveness of the implementation of the methodology was assured, the next stage took place.

### 3.1.2.2. *SL Projects*

There are two types of SL projects: Direct and indirect services (Gallgher et al., 1999). This integrated project was a direct service that provided support to community partners in a face-to-face way, meeting a particular need. To achieve this, students needed to understand the needs of businesses in the area.

This implementation of SL aimed to show students the relevance of the role of business professionals; it was intended that they would become real consultants for companies and provide all their cost and marketing knowledge to improve the consulting business.

The subjects were designed in such a way that students would have the opportunity to achieve results such as: Effective communication, job organization, teamwork, identification and problem-solution, among others (Kearney, 2004).

The implementation of SL in a marketing course is probably the most challenging, because it is very likely the first exposure of students to the concepts and skills required in marketing; however, it is also an excellent opportunity for these beginning students to experience the application in the real world, becoming real consultants, evaluating existing business efforts and implementing strategic plans, where the various functions of marketing are integrated (Petkus, 2000).

In terms of cost, students could perform analysis of financial documentation by identifying, classifying, and calculating costs for the different products offered by the companies, putting into practice theoretical concepts related to the matter and to experience real experience, in addition to complementing this with the use of information and communication technologies by building technological tools such as those suggested by Pontes et al. (2020)

### 3.1.2.3. *Operational*

An operational feasibility study can be carried out from three different points of view: Faculty/university, student and community



(Musa et al., 2017). The operational feasibility study should consider institutional commitment (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) and resources. In this sense, the FACE Improvement Plan provided support to teachers in the curricular changes of both subjects and guidance for the implementation of the SL methodology. When the planning was carried out, the team determined the number of students by groups, in order to achieve a correct operability of the SL methodology; in turn, the operational feasibility study identified, from a community perspective, the most appropriate community partners for the implementation of this integrated project.

#### *3.1.2.4. Financial*

Financial support requires the commitment of the institution (Seifer & Connors, 2007). A financial requirement is usually determined by the size of the classes and the nature of the project (Musa et al., 2017).

Managing fourteen projects within the community was a challenge and it requires a huge amount of time, work and resources to achieve the ultimate goal of SL. The SL budget proposal was prepared in terms of the design, planning and costs involved, which was sent to the responsible unit.

After presenting the SL budget proposal, financial support was received from the university, the Faculty of Business Sciences and the Department of Business Management. The amount received by the sponsors was used for field work, printing materials, launching the integrated project, administrative and related work, all of which made it possible to operationalize the methodology properly.

As suggested by Musa et al. (2017), the budget plan was carried out ensuring that the integrated SL project could be implemented effectively and efficiently in the community.

The financial feasibility study considered the costs involved in logistics, where the educational entity's units were used, specifically

the UBB extension center, which is physically located in a central and strategic location in the city of central-southern Chile. The launch of the project and the presentations were carried out in these units, for the ease and comfort of both the entrepreneurs (community partners) and the students.

Within the administrative work, both professors of each subject had an assistant to ease the administrative work.

#### *3.1.2.5. Technical*

The technical feasibility study relates to the number of students that can be admitted for a successful development of the SL project (Musa et al., 2017), in this case the integrated project included a total of 64 students, resulting in 14 teams that worked with the same number of companies in the area.

Within the technical feasibility of the integrated project, it was also necessary to identify the technology and communication requirements demanded by students, community partners and teachers. The UBB loans laptops to students and professors. Internet service, projectors, electricity and software used for data analysis were available at the education institution.

## **3.2. Phase 2: Delivering SL in an Integrated Project**

After all the components in Phase 1 were considered, Phase 2 focuses on the implementation of the integrated SL project in the subjects by using two steps:

### *3.2.1. Step 1: Establishing Community Participation*

Building a partnership between the higher education institution and the community is a crucial process for a successful community participation (Musa et al., 2017).

Community participation is described as the collaboration between the university and its com-



munities to achieve the exchange of resources and knowledge that is mutually beneficial in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Driscoll, 2009).

A well-planned community partnership is needed to ensure that they are not only willing to participate, but also that the community and the educational institution can collaborate effectively. During this moment, both the community and the university must understand and mutually agree on the benefits of SL for each party (Musa et al., 2017).

Since preliminary and effective involvement with community partners is a crucial process, the SL team designed and implemented the next steps of involvement between the community and the higher education institution. At the first meeting of the Integrated Cost and Marketing Project with SL, some questions were highlighted, such as: What is SL? How does the SL program benefit both parties? What cost and marketing projects could be developed for the community? And what are the project preferences that are related to the needs?

At this stage, an approach was used to identify the needs of community partners. Since SL is a win-win situation, the requirements for the course content, the student's knowledge and skills were combined with the list of community-proposed SL projects. Both reached explicit agreement and expectations in terms of execution by the students to the community.

### *3.2.2. Step 2: Institutionalizing SL in the faculty, students, and the community*

After identifying the course requirements for working with SL, the academic unit must consider SL as part of the student's culture (Musa et al., 2017). In this line of work, the FACE was awarded in 2014 a performance agreement aimed at the implementation and development of the Improvement Plan, Funded by the World Bank through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Chile (Service Learning Program, 2017). Within its purposes is the improvement

of the competences of professionals for the formation of the academic programs of the Faculty with the SL methodology.

Another objective was to improve the administration and use of ICT equipment and infrastructure to support the management and learning of professors through real experiences and with the contents of the subjects, implementing the SL methodology and evaluation tools (Programa Aprendizaje Servicio, 2017). It is important to note that ICTs have an increasing influence on young people by offering the possibility of communicating interactively, experimenting, solving problems, managing all kinds of data and simulating real situations (Barrientos-Báez, 2016).

The materialization of these methodologies in the subjects was through the incorporation of an integrated project, which consisted in that the students had to advise companies belonging to the Region of Ñuble (Chile) in a concrete need, according to the graduation profile of the business student, turning learners into true business consultants.

The evaluation of the activity was systematic and with all the actors involved. It was expected that the incorporation of this new methodology will produce the following results: improvement of academic performance in students, significant contributions to the development of social skills as collaborative work (García-Roca, 2019), effective oral and written communication, the permanent search for learning, and network collaboration between the university and the businesses of the sector.

To achieve this goal, team works were formed from five to six participants with a total population of 64 students, resulting in a total of 14 team works (two sections and both subjects).

The teams were formed on the first day of class using the VARK Learning Styles questionnaire and Team Based Learning methodology. Therefore, the selection was not out of affinity and the teams created were mixed with different learning styles.





The working groups had to define a name for their team, and remained permanently formed throughout the semester and for all the activities that were developed in both subjects.

The SL integrated cost and marketing project consulting was developed over a semester, and students had to contact a company to work on the project, and a monthly working meeting with students, entrepreneurs and professors was planned at the university campus.

At the first working meeting, the objectives of the project were explained to the entrepreneurs, defining the commitments of the parties, the students and the entrepreneurs, for the successful development of the integrated project; subsequently, each team worked together to define the problem to be solved by the students inside the company, and they also developed the planning of the activities (Gantt Chart) and the consent of the agreement.

For their part, the entrepreneurs committed themselves to providing all the information that the students required for the development of the integrated project, such as: Attending monthly meetings scheduled at the university and evaluating the performance of the working groups; in turn, students and professors committed themselves to providing an advisory report that would solve the problem raised by the employer in their company.

At each working meeting, the students presented an advance of the aspects to be considered by each report in accordance with the initial planning, which was presented in a writ-

ten report and then orally to the commission. Feedback was immediate at each working meeting, and both the written report and the presentation were subsequently graded.

### **3.3. Fase 3: Evaluación, reflexión y monitoreo del ApS en un proyecto integrado**

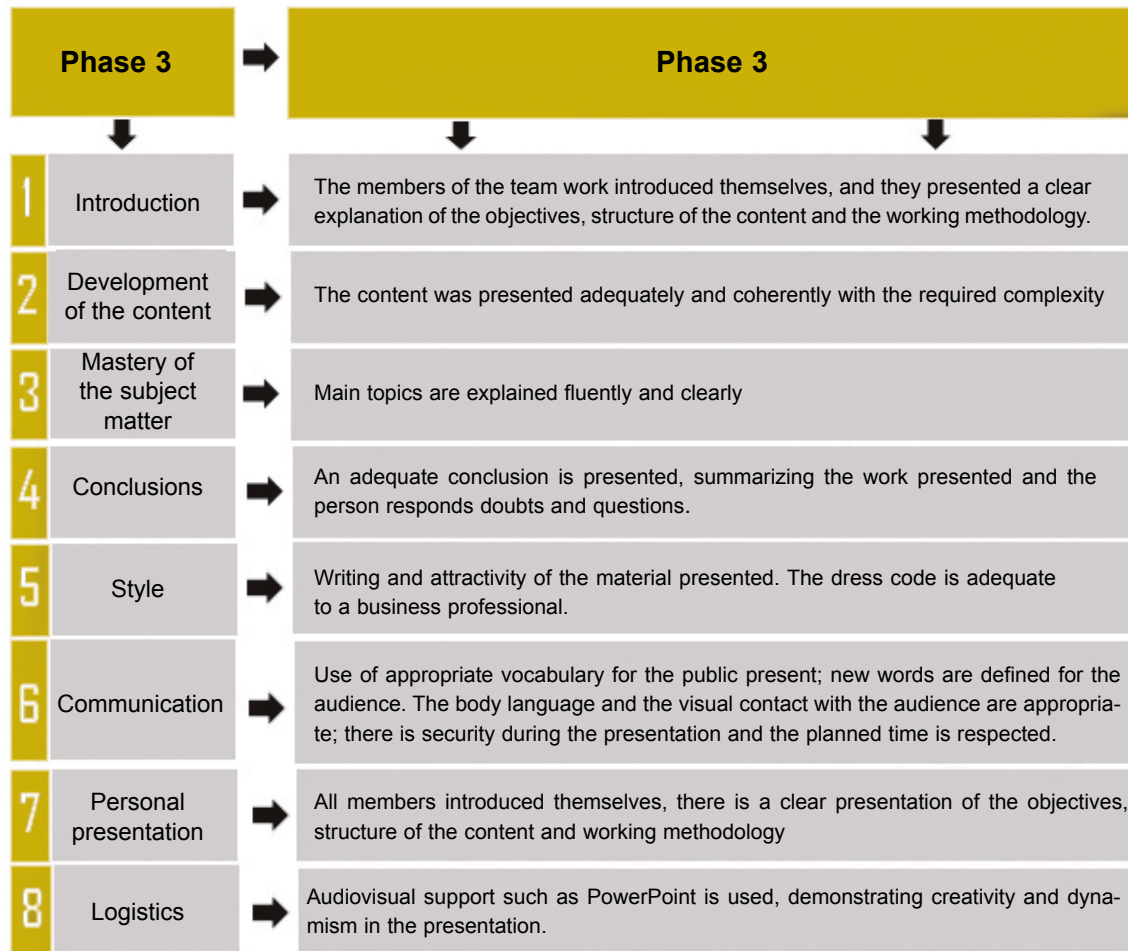
Bringle and Hatcher (1996), indicate that teachers and students can be evaluated using the course result, such as the satisfaction and outcome of the student's learning, while community partners can assess the impact of SL activities on their needs met by students in the integrated project. Higher-order thinking at every stage is important to enrich the learning experience and enhance civic responsibility and strengthen the community (Seifer & Connors, 2007).

After visits to community partners and the work generated, the students returned to the University to complete their tasks and reflect in terms of learning units, individual development, soft communication skills, and technical skills. In addition, they reviewed their guide log of each visit, completed a reflection form and a log book. In the reflection, information was obtained on the experience of the courses, the knowledge and the understanding degree of the courses, the skills acquired and the impact on the community of the SL project.

A total of four presentations were made with written reports delivered with progress. The aspects evaluated can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Evaluated Aspects in the application of SL



Source: Own elaboration based on the implementation of SL

Qualitative-quantitative research techniques were used to assess the impact of this SL methodology. The instrument used was a self-efficacy survey applied to students at the end of the integrated project.

To reflect, in terms of community impact and university-community relations (Musa et al., 2017), employers were given a closure satisfaction survey consisting of eleven questions of which six were closed and five open questions, seeking their opinion on the experience of the project, qualifying the experience of working on this project and evaluating the skills observed in the students.

## 4. Conclusions

It is clear that SL methodology in a business program, through an integrated project, has multiple benefits for all participants involved. Students, being able to apply in a practical way the theoretical content presented in the classroom, enrich their learning by acquiring experiences from the real world. Community partners can address unmet needs and institutions can generate concrete actions that are linked to the environment.

However, in addition to knowing the benefits of this innovative methodology, it should be



noted that when implementing this process there are many details that must be taken into account and must be considered for a good execution of this SL methodology.

This study described a complete and detailed process on the design, implementation and management of a SL methodology that included two subjects (costs and marketing) of the Business Engineering career of UBB FACE.

In this paper, each of the phases applied during the process were presented in detail with their respective sub-phases, all of which are fundamental to achieving a good design, implementation and management of the SL methodology in an integrated project. None of the steps is more important than others, therefore it is considered that they are all vital in order to achieve the desired objective of having a meaningful contribution to teaching-learning through this innovative pedagogy.

When comparing with other studies, it is found that Pizarro et al. (2015) indicate that the implementation of SL is based on three phases (search and classification of community partners, implementation of the methodology, and monitoring-evaluation). Likewise, Petkus (2000) developed a theoretical and practical framework to guide a marketing course with SL. When analyzing them in detail, several differences with the models listed above can be found:

This methodology is applied in a single subject (there are two in this study).

The work of Pizarro et al. (2015) indicates three phases, where the first one corresponds to the search for community partners; then the implementation phase of the methodology, where the community partner is linked with the students; later the consultancy is presented; and finally, the monitoring and evaluation are presented. The difference with the proposal presented lies in the phases and specification of each one, and this article includes an earlier stage corresponding to institutional commitment and feasibility studies.

Petkus's work aims to provide a framework for the design and implementation of SL marketing courses, but primarily based on the course program itself, without incorporating other operational variables that are essential in the process for a good implementation.

In view of the background, it can be noted that the great contribution of this study is to detail each phase, which begins with a feasibility phase, since most of the models proposed to incorporate this SL methodology begin from the stage of seeking community partners or verifying whether the methodology is in line with the program of the subject. This study emphasizes that these phases are important, but it is also necessary to carry out previous feasibility studies to know whether it will be possible to achieve the objectives of one or more subjects that incorporate this innovative methodology.

The findings of this study are expected to be useful in advancing the understanding of how to design, implement and manage projects integrated with SL, thereby giving value to all participants and to the attainment of teaching-learning objectives.

While this study provides great value in describing the experience of an innovative methodology in an integrated project, it also has a number of limitations. One of them points to the design, implementation and management of the SL methodology in two specific subjects of the business area and in a single context that is the Chilean.

On the other hand, the implementation of this methodology was carried out in a higher education institution that has the support of this type of methodology, and that has a SL institutional program. Therefore, the phases to carry out this type of methodology in another type of institution could be different or very difficult to operationalize.

Future research could be carried out in subjects in other areas, in other contexts in Latin America and in other types of institutions, to



verify whether the phases identified in this study are met or have significant differences.

## Note

1. Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic by its acronyms.

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