<u>*Research Article*</u>

The Influence of Student-Community Partner Working Relationships on Satisfaction: A South African University Service Learning Programme[*]

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Abstract

This study investigated a service learning programme (SLP), which was established by the Marketing Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in South Africa. The purpose of the SLP was to provide community partners (small businesses) marketing services at minimal or no cost by granting undergraduate marketing students the opportunity to practically apply the theoretical marketing communication teaching in a real-life business environment. The students formed agencies and were required to establish a real-life agency-client working relationship with their chosen community partners (SL clients) (that had little to no marketing communication) to develop a campaign plan in a bid to improve marketing performance. The primary research aim of the study was to examine the influence of the student agency working relationships on the community partners' satisfaction. The research also investigated the effect of the agency-client relationship on SL client, student agency and SLP measurement variables. A quantitative approach was used to survey community partners that participated in the CPUT Marketing Department SLP over a five year period via a questionnaire. The perceptions of 107 client community partners' were analyzed via ANOVA to determine the benefits, challenges and experiences of the SLP. The research revealed that a vast majority of the participating SL client organizations were either satisfied or very satisfied with the agency-client working relationships with the student agencies. The SLP agency-client working relationships were also found to yield significantly positive associations with perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction and future participation by the community partners.

Keywords: Service learning programmes (SLP), student agencies, community partners (SL client organizations), small businesses, agency-client working relationships

1. INTRODUCTION

Service learning (SL) (also commonly referred as academic service-learning, academic community service, and community-based learning) is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems, and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Many recent service learning programmes (SLPs) have been developed and implemented by education institutions around the world (Garger, Vracheva, & Jacques, 2020; George, Menon, Thevanoor, & Tharakan, 2020; Gonzales, Harmon, & Fenn, 2021; Herlina, Widodo, Madhakomala, 2019; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2020) and in South Africa (Botha & Bezuidenhout, 2020; Du Plessis, 2020; Jacobs, 2020), but the research of these programmes have generally focused on the student-orientated benefits derived from the SLP, which include: the ability to apply and master course content and theory (du Toit, 2019; Juaneda-Ayensa, Olarte-Pascual, San Emeterio, & Pelegrín-Borondo, 2019); deeper learning (Matzembacher, Gonzales, & do Nascimento, 2019); increased employability

(Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2019); improved academic performance (Cheng & Wang, 2019); reduction of previously held stereotypes about others and/or increased intercultural sensitivity (Alexander-Ruff & Ruff, 2021; du Toit, 2019; Gipson, Delello, & McWhorter, 2021; Hardin-Ramanan, Soupramanien, & DeLapeyre, 2018; Kim & Choi, 2020; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021); ability to integrate knowledge silos and become more interested in the learning process (Hardin-Ramanan et al., 2018); gaining a different world view and leaving comfort zones (Matzembacher et al., 2019); refining problem solving and critical thinking skills (Matzembacher et al., 2019); and developing soft skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork, self-management, and crisis management (Hardin-Ramanan et al., 2018; Jones, Li, Zomorodi, Broadhurst, & Weil, 2018; McNatt, 2020; Naik, Bandi, & Mahajan, 2020). Hence, it is evident that extensive research has been conducted to determine the value of SLPs for the participating students, but limited formal research has been conducted to determine the value of the programmes for the participating organizations, which is concerning, as a key principle of SL is mutuality and reciprocity (Barrientos, 2010; do Amaral, 2019; Matthews, 2019; Plaut, 2013; Rinaldo, Davis, & Borunda, 2019; Vizenor, Souza, & Ertmer, 2017).

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Marketing Department (located in Cape Town, South Africa) established a SLP to offer local small businesses (community partners) marketing services at little-to-no financial cost by employing the services of undergraduate marketing students, who need to obtain practical marketing communication experience in fulfilment of their qualification. As part of the SLP, student teams (agencies) conduct market research, develop marketing materials, engage in marketing planning and design, implement integrated marketing communication (IMC) campaigns, and facilitate informal on-the-job training and mentorship for their community partners (SL clients). The ultimate goal of the programme is for the student agencies to foster a working real-life agency-client relationship to facilitate marketing for their community partners so as to generate improved performance and increased sales. The SLP has served the marketing needs of more than 800 small businesses since its inception in 2010.

Scholtz (2018) considered student and community partner feedback from CPUT's Marketing Department SLP for a single year. The author established that the students received a number of benefits from the SLP such as: team work, a real-world learning environment to apply classroom knowledge, time management, innovative problem solving, and the ability to work under pressure. The community partner provided written feedback via informal reports upon conclusion of the SLP, which were generally positive and included benefits such as: marketing tool development, online platform marketing training, inspiration owing to students' creativity, and innovative marketing ideas. Although valuable insights on some of the programme benefits for students and clients were garnered to improve the SLP, these were mainly descriptive in nature and there was a need to conduct formal research to provide a greater understanding of how the SLP benefits the community partners.

Markus, Howard, and King (1993) and Niemi, Hepburn, and Chapman (2000) posit that effective working relationships were one of the most important factors to implement effective SLPs. An agency-client working relationship involves two parties (i.e. the students and community partners in this instance) working together in order to achieve a successful outcome for a creative campaign and has both a relational and contractual aspect to it (Keegan, Rowley, & Tonge, 2017). Research by Markus et al. (1993) and Niemi et al. (2000) also reveal that another important aspect of successful SLPs in business education is that the programmes are long enough for students to develop effective working relationships with the community partners. The CPUT Marketing Department SLP ran for over four months each year, giving student agencies time to form effective working relationships with participating community partners. The working relationships usually start with preliminary meetings to acquaint the students with the client's strategic vision and desired objectives. This is usually followed up by more in-depth research, analysis and interaction.

Hence, the main aim of the research was to consider the influence of the student agency working relationships on the participating SL client organizations' satisfaction. The study also considered the effect of the agency-client working relationship on SL clients and student agency variables, and SLP measurement variables (nature of the working relationship, perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction, and future participation) in terms of satisfaction.

1.1. Service Learning in Business Education

SL has been recommended as a pedagogy that provides a solution to the apparent shortcomings in business education (Kennedy, Billett, Gherardi, & Grealish, 2015). SL provides a means for students to take charge of their education and really engage in relevant real-life situations that relate to their discipline of study. Students become active learners rather than passive observers of lecturers (Lawrence, 2018). Although there is much evidence demonstrating the benefits of SL for the education of business students, it has only seen more use as a teaching technique since the early 2000s (Andrews, 2007). Before this, SL was primarily the domain of academic areas such as philosophy, healthcare, history, psychology, sociology, gerontology, political science, and journalism (Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, & Zlotkowski, 2000).

Kenworthy-U'Ren (2008) noted that the practice of SL as a teaching tool in business education had been steadily increasing. Desplaces, Steinberg, Coleman, and Kenworthy-Uren (2006) list some of the potential underlying reasons for the increase: a response to questions about the societal relevance of management education, a shift away from disciplinary silos to more integrated forms of teaching and learning, and an acknowledgement that SL is one of the most effective tools through which students can apply academic knowledge and practice reflective learning while participating in active citizenship. Papamarcos (2005) exhorts fellow management educators by stressing the responsibility that business schools have to prepare students for "lives of civic engagement…involving students as voluntary agents of social change." Although it may be difficult to isolate exactly what has brought about the increased engagement in SL by business schools, it is evident that this drive has been making a difference for students, institutions, and communities (Desplaces et al., 2006; Fraustino, Pressgrove, & Colistra, 2019; Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2019; Matzembacher et al., 2019). Table 1 elaborates on the beneficial outcomes of SL in business education for these three stakeholders.

Table 1. Service learning outcomes for students, universities, and communities

Students	University	Community
Personal growth and development: • Self-esteem • Personal efficacy and sense of responsibility • Ethical/moral development and reinforced values and beliefs • Exploration of new roles, identities, and interests • Willingness to take risks and accept new challenges Intellectual development and academic learning: • Basic skills including oral and written communication, expressing ideas, conducting research, learning about careers, reading, and calculating • Higher-level thinking skills, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking Skills and issues specific to degree program and service experience: • Motivation to learn • Learning skills, including observation, inquiry, and application of knowledge • Insight, judgment, and understanding Social growth and development: • Social responsibility, corporate responsibility, and concern for others • Business efficacy • Civic participation • Knowledge and exploration of careers • Understanding and appreciation of, and ability to relate to, people from a wide range of backgrounds and life situations	Paradigm shift: • Teachers as coaches and facilitators; students responsible for their own learning • Motivated learners engaged in authentic and significant work • Cooperative learning environment • Teachers as reflective practitioners engaged in planning, curriculum development, and inquiry • Collaborative decision making among administrators, academic staff, students, and community members • Positive academic climate • Community involvement, resources, and support in the educational process	Valuable service to meet direct human, business, educational, health, and environmental needs • Schools as resources: schools/teacher/student teams serving as researchers and resources in problem-solving and community development • Empowerment: school/community partnerships to assess, plan, and collaboratively meet needs • Citizenship: students become active stakeholders in the community • Infusion of innovation toward improving the institutional practices of schools and communities • Understanding and appreciation of diversity -across generations, cultures, perspectives, and abilities

Source: Adapted from Black (2002)

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Of the many benefits it is clear that students grow personally, intellectually, and academically as they are able to engage in active learning in a real-life situation; they learn skills specific to their field of study as they apply theory to solve discipline-related problems; and they grow socially by taking up their civic responsibility and engaging with people from a wide variety of backgrounds (Black, 2002). The university benefits by giving educators a range of opportunities, such as the prospect to make their teaching more learner-centered by enabling students to take responsibility for their own learning; the ability to lead social responsibility initiatives by planning effective SLPs and championing social change in their faculty; and the chance to incorporate knowledges from other sources (like the community) into their teaching and learning (Black, 2002). In addition, the university as a whole can get involved in the community in a positive way by making its resources and knowledge available, which among other things leads to positive public relations (Black, 2002). However, as mentioned in prior text, additional inquiry is necessary to determine the effect of SLPs on community partners since most research is directed at the students.

1.2. Agency-client working Relationships

The term 'agency-client relationship' refers to the relationship between an organization and its marketing agencies. The importance of the agency-client relationship has long been recognized (Wackman, Salmon, & Salmon, 1986). Marketing agencies play a significant role in the development of the marketing strategies of firms (Keegan et al., 2017). An agency-client relationship has both relational and contractual elements and involves two parties working together in order to achieve success in creative communication campaign outcomes. Understanding the nature of the mutual roles and power balance is vital in determining whether the relationship is a partnership or a battleground (Zolkiewski, Burton, & Stratoudaki, 2008). Both agencies and clients face consequences in the event of contract termination or agency switching (Arul, 2010). Traditionally, the agencies involved in these relationships were advertising agencies or smaller desktop publishing houses, but because of the advent of digital technologies, organizations are increasingly contracting specialist digital marketing agencies as well, which often leads to networks of agency-client relationships with multiple actors (Komulainen, Mainela, & Tähtinen, 2016).

Very few studies have looked into the nature of small business agency-client relationships and most of them were conducted before the year 2000. These studies are nevertheless discussed below.

A study by Michell (1988) suggests that small client/small agency relationships are among the most volatile in the marketing communication industry. Would the relationships between the student agencies and participating community partner client organizations' (small businesses) in the SLP prove to be as volatile as those described by the author?

A study by Sekely and Blakney (1996) in the Midwest region of America evaluated the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and opinions of 127 small to medium-sized clients towards their agencies, and the advantages and disadvantages that small local agencies offered their clients. Although the research does not empirically compare the performance of small agencies with large agencies, it does indicate that small agencies performed well. Areas in which small agencies particularly excelled included creativity, personal attention, and account services (like account handling, flexibility, communication, meeting deadlines, following through, and so forth). The results indicate that 35 to 40 per cent of clients rated their agencies as excellent or very good for creativity, adaptability, flexibility, and meeting deadlines. In addition, 30 to 35 per cent of respondents were pleased with the quality of communication, agency personnel, and cost consciousness. Can student agencies in the SLP also provide such personalized, creative, and dedicated marketing communication services?

More than 20 per cent of clients rated small local agencies as poor or very poor for quality of research and public relations services. Sekely and Blakney (1996) consider this to be understandable due to the ancillary nature of these services, with small agencies needing to focus their resources and attention on key services. Sekely and Blakney (1996) suggest that agencies could improve their research performance by developing strong working relationships with small market research firms rather than trying to offer the service in-house. They maintain that less attention should be paid to improving public relations, as this seemed to be less important to clients. In the case of the SLP, student agencies functioned as full-house agencies and therefore did the market research, marketing material design and development, campaign development, and public relations for their community partner client organizations.

Local agency performance in the area of comprehending the clients' business received mixed ratings. More than 33 per cent of clients thought that agencies performed excellently or very well, whereas roughly 24 per cent considered agency performance to be poor in this regard (Sekely & Blakney, 1996). The authors believe that the poor performance of some small agencies could be related to having only a limited number of specialist staff, perhaps due to a shortage of funds, or having little experience in certain product and market areas. Considering that CPUT students worked in groups of three to five and had under two years of marketing knowledge and experience, could this finding be similar for the SLP?

More than 80 per cent of clients rated design, copy, and marketing strategy as either critical or important services for an agency. Marketing planning, account handling, media planning, and market research were all considered moderately important. Sales promotion, public relations, and collateral services were thought to have limited importance. The functions that were considered to be the least important were TV programming, broadcast creativity, and information brokerage (Sekely & Blakney, 1996). Considering that the respondents were all small to medium-sized businesses, with a large segment functioning in the business to business space, it makes sense that TV and broadcasting services were not deemed important. In the case of the SLP, student agencies were charged with using free or relatively inexpensive marketing channels to serve the IMC needs of participating community partner client organizations. In addition, students were encouraged to train their small business clients in the various benefits of a number of marketing communication practices such as sales promotion, public relations, and market research.

In terms of the role that agencies play, the majority of respondents (54.5%) felt that when it comes to marketing communication, agencies should play a leadership role (Sekely & Blakney, 1996). This is not surprising as agencies are primarily hired for their expertise in this area. In addition, small firms generally have very limited in-house marketing communication staff and therefore need agencies to take charge of this function for them (Sekely & Blakney, 1996). In terms of market research, marketing strategy, and sales promotion, clients felt that agencies should play the role of partner and counsellor. In the area of new product planning, clients preferred that agencies did not get involved, or if they did, that they perform only a counselling role. Sekely and Blakney (1996) speculate that this could be due to the reluctance of firms to share internal information with agencies. The role that firms wanted agencies to play in the area of public relations was inconclusive, as results were evenly distributed across responses. In the SLP, student agencies were instructed to work with small business clients that had little or no marketing communication, and they therefore took on a leadership role in this regard. The student agencies also played the roles of educators and counsellors by transferring marketing knowledge to community partner client organizations and guiding their thinking and decision-making relating to IMC.

In the case of the SLP, most community partners were so small that they did not have a marketing department. As is the case with most small and micro businesses in South Africa, the owner-manager was in charge of marketing and therefore functioned as the marketing manager. In

addition to functioning as external agencies, student agencies also functioned as internal ad-hoc marketing departments during the SLP. As such, they developed IMC campaign plans to support the overall marketing objectives of the owner-manager, and helped the owner-manager organize, supervise, and control the various marketing-related activities related to the IMC campaign. They also worked with the other departments in the small business to integrate the marketing activities with operations, while also helping the owner-managers to implement and evaluate marketing activities. Merkey and Palombi (2020); and Rinaldo et al. (2019) also highlighted the importance of robust working relationship between students and community partners in terms of SLP. Hence, the key objective of this research study was to assess the success (client satisfaction) of the working relationships formed between the student agencies and community partner in terms of the SLP.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

The quantitative research design sought to produce credible results that approximate reality and are judged to be accurate, trustworthy, and reasonable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, the research design sought to enhance credibility by showing relationships between various hypothesized variables while taking potential sources of error into account. This research design was used to determine the satisfaction that participating community partner client organizations derived from working relationships with student agencies via the CPUT Marketing Department SLP in South Africa.

2.2 Population and Sample

A total of 331 community partner client organizations (small businesses) had participated in SLP over a five year period. Judgement sampling was used to select only those organizations which had already participated in programme evaluation through submitting written feedback via informal reports immediately after participating in the programme (a total of 294 small businesses). Considering the small number of firms in the sample frame, it was decided that a complete enumeration of the sample frame would generate more accurate data.

2.3 Data Collection

Face-to-face person-administered surveys were conducted by fieldworkers in order to take advantage of the benefits of collecting data in person, such as having direct access to low incidence respondents and the opportunity to provide respondents with personal assistance to minimize the incidence of missing or erroneous data (Sincero, 2012). However, each small business respondent in the sample frame was screened via an initial telephone call that was also used to obtain permission to conduct research relating to the SLP. A total of 107 small business owners participated in the study, but owing to missing data, 99 small businesses were primarily used for the data analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

The first set of statistics calculated in the quantitative analysis was a set of descriptive statistics that included response frequencies, means (measure of central tendency), and standard deviations (to measure variability). Each question was analyzed separately and the results of the analysis used to develop frequency tables. The study measured the influence of the community partners' satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship in relation to a number of other variables, which included community partner client organizations, student agency and SLP measurement (nature of the working relationship, perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction, and future participation) variables via a one-way ANOVA. However, as the one-way ANOVA is an omnibus test it cannot determine which groups were significantly different from the others, so the post-hoc test, viz. the

Bonferroni, was used to determine the pair-wise comparisons of the estimated marginal means. Pair-wise comparisons enabled the researcher to compare one variable with another in order to determine the significant differences between the aforementioned variables.

3. FINDINGS

A little under 90 per cent of the community partner client organizations were older than two and a half years and six out of ten employed less than five people. Over 90 per cent of the small businesses were registered as a PTY (LTD), Closed Corporation (CC) or Sole Proprietor, and over half earned less than R200 000 per annum. A little under nine out of ten student agencies passed the SLP and nearly 20 per cent passed with a distinction (a final mark of over 75%). A vast majority of the students' academic registration was on a full-time basis (refer to Table 2). The ANOVA measure did not reveal any significant differences for the small business age, amount of employees, legal form of ownership, small business turnover and study programme (refer to Table 2).

However, the ANOVA revealed a significant difference for the SLP student project evaluation mark ($p < 0.050$). Community partner client organizations (small businesses) that worked with students who achieved a distinction (75%-100%) for their project (M = 3.57, SD = 0.598) experienced a higher degree of agency-client working relationship satisfaction levels than those who worked with students that passed (50%-74%) their project (M = 2.83, SD = 0.821) or failed (0%-49%) their project (M = 2.77, SD = 1.092).

Table 2. Community partner client organizations and student group demographic variable' descriptive statistics and agency-client working relationship satisfaction significance levels

Community partner client organizations' (small businesses) variables		%	p
Small business age	Less than 1.5 years	3.8	
	1.5-2.5 years	6.7	
	2.5-5.5 years	33.3	0.821
	5.5-10.5 years	28.6	
	Older than 10.5 years	27.6	
Number of permanent employees	0-4	61.8	
	5-19	37.3	0.469
	20-49	1.0	
Legal form of ownership	PTY (LTD)	22.5	
	Closed Corporation (CC)	26.5	
	Partnership	6.9	0.272
	Joint venture	1.0	
	Sole Proprietor	43.1	
Small business turnover per annum	Less than R200 000	52.9	
	R200 000 – 1 000 000	33.3	
	R1 000 000 – R3 000 000	9.2	
	R3 000 000 – R6 000000	1.1	0.162
	R600 000 – R16 000 000	2.3	
	R16 000 000 – R32 000 000	1.1	
Student agency variables			
SLP student project evaluation mark	Fail (<50%)	12.1	
	Pass (50%-74%)	68.2	0.001*
	Distinction (>75%)	19.6	
Study classification of student group	Part-time	28.0	
	Full-time	72.0	0.097

*ANOVA showed a significant difference at $p < 0.001$

A large proportion of respondents (77.8%) declared their satisfaction with the SLP agency-client working relationship. Just under half the respondents (49.5%) felt satisfied with the agency-client working relationship, and 28.3 per cent were very satisfied (refer to Table 3).

Overall, the community partner client organizations had positive thoughts regarding the nature of their working relationship with students. Upon evaluation of the student agencies, a large proportion of respondents recorded that students were polite (83.7%), respected the times of the business (76%), were neatly dressed (70.2%), and communicated with employees effectively (70.2%). Additionally, respondents felt that student were punctual for engagements (69.2%), used appropriate language when interacting (68.3%), and acted professionally (68.3%).

More than three quarters of the community partner client organizations (77.7%) confirmed the usefulness of the agency-client working relationship (at the time the SLP was implemented) between the student agency and their small business organizations. Over half of the community partner client organizations (58%) identified a lack of time as the reason why their working relationship with students was not as useful as it could have been. Other factors noted as contributing to a lack of usefulness included a lack of finances (14.5%), a lack of know-how (14.5%), and a lack of internal communication (10.1%). Those factors that saw the least mention were a lack of the right people (4.3%) and a lack of student experience (2.9%).

The vast majority of community partner client organizations (77.9%) felt that the agency-client working relationships with the student agencies had a positive impact on their small business organizations. A substantial group (40.8%) believed that their working relationships with students helped the organization gain new customers. Additionally, 37.9 per cent of respondents felt that the working relationship played a role in increasing sales, 37.9 per cent believed that it contributed to an increase in brand awareness, and 24.3 per cent felt that it helped increase customer loyalty.

The community partner client organizations exhibited positive sentiments regarding the CPUT Marketing Department SLP in that 71.7 per cent were satisfied with the overall SLP and 80.8 per cent would participate in the SLP again (refer to Table 3).

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Table 3. SLP measurement variables' descriptive statistics and agency-client working relationship satisfaction significance levels

SLP measurement variables		%	p
SLP agency-client working relationship satisfaction (dependent variable)	Very dissatisfied	28.3	-
	Dissatisfied	49.5	
	Satisfied	14.1	
	Very satisfied	8.1	
Nature of SLP agency-client working relationship	Student agencies were punctual	69.2	0.002**
	Student agencies respected our time	76.0	0.000*
	Student agencies were sensitive to our needs	54.8	0.158
	Student agencies were polite	83.7	0.004**
	Student agencies were neatly dressed	70.2	0.112
	Student agencies communicated effectively	70.2	0.000*
	Student agencies used appropriate language	68.3	0.001**
	Student agencies were professional	68.3	0.000*
SLP agency-client working relationship usefulness	Not useful at all	22.3	0.000*
	Was useful before but not anymore	36.9	
	Continues to be somewhat useful	20.4	
	Continues to be very useful	20.4	
SLP lack of usefulness reasons	Lack of time	58.0	0.680
	Lack of the right people	4.3	0.529

	Lack of finances	14.5	0.181
	Lack of know-how	14.5	0.467
	Not appropriate for our business	10.1	0.199
	Lack of internal communication	13.0	0.000*
	Lack of involvement from students	10.1	0.000*
	Lack of student experience	2.9	0.107
SLP lasting impact of agency-client working relationship	Negative impact	3.8	
	No lasting impact	18.3	
	Minimal lasting impact	26.0	0.000*
	Some lasting impact	30.8	
	Significant lasting impact	21.2	
SLP perceived impact of agency-client working relationship	Increased sales	37.9	0.000*
	New customers	40.8	0.000*
	Increased brand awareness	37.9	0.000*
	Increased customer loyalty	24.3	0.004**
	Increased business efficiency	18.4	0.013**
	Increased competitive advantage	6.8	0.020**
	Increased employee motivation	20.4	0.032**
	No positive impact	29.1	0.000*
Overall SLP satisfaction	Very dissatisfied	5.7	
	Dissatisfied	22.6	0.000*
	Satisfied	47.2	
	Very satisfied	24.5	
SLP future participation	Yes	80.8	0.000*
	No	19.2	

*ANOVA showed a significant difference at p < 0.001
**ANOVA showed a significant difference at p < 0.050

SLP agency-client working relationship satisfaction (M = 2.98, SD = 0.869) was used as the dependent variable to consider the influence on a number of SLP measurement variables, namely the nature of the working relationship, perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction, and future participation. The ANOVA revealed that no significant differences were found for the student agency sensitivity, neatness, lack of time, lack of people, lack of money, lack of knowledge, inappropriateness, and lack of student experience. However, the Bonferroni correction pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal means disclosed significant differences between the following variables:

Nature of SLP agency-client working relationship: Punctuality (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations reporting that student agencies were punctual for planned meetings and engagements (M = 3.16, SD = 0.813) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not report this (M = 2.58, SD = 1.089). Respect (p < 0.001): Community partner client organizations that stated that student agencies respected them and their time (M = 3.26, SD = 0.628) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those SL clients that did not state this (M = 2.22, SD = 0.974). Politeness (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations claiming that student agencies were polite (M = 3.10, SD = 0.739) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not make this claim (M = 2.47, SD = 1.172). Effective communication (p < 0.001): Community partner client organizations that stated that student agencies communicated with them effectively (M = 3.21, SD = 0.691) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not state this (M = 2.52, SD = 1.004).

Appropriate language ($p < 0.050$): Community partner client organizations that stated that student agencies communicated with them in the appropriate language (M = 3.19, SD = 0.710) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not state this (M = 2.60, SD = 1.006). Professional ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations reporting that student agencies engaged with them in a professional manner (M = 3.21, SD = 0.783) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not report this (M = 2.48, SD = 0.851).

SLP agency-client working relationship usefulness ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that stated that their agency-client working relationship had not been useful to them at all (M = 1.77, SD = 0.752) experienced lower levels of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that claimed their agency-client working relationship had been useful before but not anymore (M = 3.11, SD = 0.471), those that claimed that their agency-client working relationship continued to be somewhat useful (M = 3.33, SD = 0.485), and those that stated that their agency-client working relationship continued to be very useful (M = 3.70, SD = 0.470). Additionally, those community partner client organizations that stated that their agency-client working relationship continued to be very useful (M = 3.70, SD = 0.470) reported higher levels of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that stated that their agency-client working relationship had been useful before but was not anymore (M = 3.11, SD = 0.471).

SLP lack of usefulness reasons: Lack of communication ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that claimed they had encountered challenges in their agency-client working relationship because of a lack of communication (M = 1.88, SD = 0.835) experienced a lower level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not claim this challenge (M = 3.08, SD = 0.806). Lack of student involvement ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that stated that they had experienced challenges in their agency-client working relationship because of a lack of involvement on the part of the student agencies (M = 1.86, SD = 0.900) experienced a lower level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not state this challenge (M = 3.07, SD = 0.809).

Lasting impact ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that found that the overall SLP had a significant lasting impact (M = 3.65, SD = 0.489) on their small business organization reported a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that found that the overall SLP had minimal lasting impact (M = 2.88, SD = 0.726), no lasting impact (M = 2.35, SD = 0.862), and a negative lasting impact (M = 1.25, SD = 0.500). Additionally, community partner client organizations that found that the overall SLP had some lasting impact (M = 3.13, SD = 0.670) on their small business organization evinced a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those community partner client organizations that found that the overall SLP had no lasting impact (M = 2.35, SD = 0.862), and a negative lasting impact (M = 1.25, SD = 0.500). Lastly, community partner client organizations that found that the overall SLP had minimal lasting impact (M = 2.88, SD = 0.726) as well as no lasting impact (M = 2.35, SD = 0.862) on their organization reported a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that found that the overall SLP had a negative lasting impact (M = 1.25, SD = 0.500).

SLP perceived impact of agency-client working relationship: Increased sales ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in sales resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.54, SD = 0.505) experienced greater satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.67, SD = 0.874). New customers ($p < 0.001$): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in new customers resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.54, SD = 0.505) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.59, SD = 0.859). Increased brand awareness ($p < 0.001$):

Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in brand awareness resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.49, SD = 0.506) experienced greater satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.65, SD = 0.899). Increased customer loyalty (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in customer loyalty resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.42, SD = 0.504) experienced greater satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.84, SD = 0.916). Increased competitive advantage (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in competitive advantage resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.71, SD = 0.488) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.92, SD = 0.867). Increased business efficiency (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in business efficiency resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.42, SD = 0.507) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.88, SD = 0.905). Increased employee motivation (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that perceived an increase in employee motivation resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 3.35, SD = 0.489) experienced a higher level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that did not perceive this increase (M = 2.89, SD = 0.920). No positive impact (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that perceived no positive impact resulting from their agency-client working relationship (M = 2.07, SD = 0.884) experienced a lower level of satisfaction with the agency-client working relationship than those that perceived a positive impact (M = 3.36, SD = 0.512).

Overall SLP satisfaction (p < 0.001): Community partner client organizations that were very dissatisfied with the overall SLP (M = 1.33, SD = 0.816) experienced a lower level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that were dissatisfied (M = 2.18, SD = 0.733), satisfied (M = 3.17, SD = 0.433), and very satisfied (M = 3.74, SD = 0.449). Additionally, those community partner client organizations that were very satisfied with the overall SLP (M = 3.74, SD = 0.449) experienced higher levels of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that were either satisfied (M = 3.17, SD = 0.433) or dissatisfied (M = 2.18, SD = 0.733). Lastly, those community partner client organizations that were satisfied with the overall SLP (M = 3.17, SD = 0.433) experienced higher levels of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that were dissatisfied (M = 2.18, SD = 0.733).

Future participation (p < 0.050): Community partner client organizations that stated that they would participate in the SLP again in the future (M = 3.12, SD = 0.743) had experienced a higher level of satisfaction with their agency-client working relationship than those that did not state this (M = 2.32, SD = 1.057).

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Most of the participating community partner client organizations (small businesses) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the working relationships with student agencies, resulting in an overall satisfaction rating of 77.8 percent. Only a little more than a fifth of small business organizations experienced dissatisfaction with the agency-client working relationships. Sprague and Hu (2015) also describe participating organizations as experiencing positive satisfaction with the working relationships, with several other SL studies reporting similar results (Barr, 2010; Barrientos, 2010; Plaut, 2013; Merkey & Palombi, 2020; Rinaldo et al., 2019; Vizenor et al., 2017). Agency-client relationship literature also confirms a connection between client satisfaction and the performance of small agencies. For example, Sekely and Blakney (1996) found that 35 to 40 per cent of clients rated their small agencies as excellent or very good for creativity, adaptability, flexibility, and meeting

deadlines. In addition, 30 per cent to 35 per cent of respondents were pleased with the quality of communication, agency personnel, and cost consciousness.

Participating community partner client organizations specify a number of characteristics of the working relationship between themselves and the student agencies, including that the students were punctual, respected their time, did not make a nuisance of themselves, were polite and neatly dressed, communicated effectively, used appropriate language, and acted professionally. These findings are echoed by a number of SL authors who assert that in general, students participating in SL are reliable, professional, interested, and involved (Jacobs, 2020; Mitchell, 2018; Vasbinder & Koehler, 2015); students communicate effectively with participating organizations (Balfour, 2020; Gazley, Bennett, & Littlepage, 2013; McNatt, 2020); students are honest, creative, innovative, organized, serious, and well prepared (Balfour, 2020; Mitchell, 2018); students are engaged, excellent, dedicated, attentive, competent, extremely professional, enthusiastic, intelligent, flexible, well-organized, and sensitive to the uniqueness of the organization (García-Rico, Martínez-Muñoz, Santos-Pastor, & Chiva-Bartoll, 2021; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021; Schachter & Schwartz, 2009). Simola (2009) also confirms that students did not make a nuisance of themselves and used the organization's time well during SL. Similar agency-client working relationships are described in a study by Sekely and Blakney (1996), who note that according to clients, small agencies outperform larger agencies in areas like creativity, personal attention, and account services (like account handling, flexibility, communication, meeting deadlines, following through, and so forth).

Significant relationships were found between satisfaction, usefulness, punctuality, respect, politeness, effective communication, appropriate language, and professionalism. Organizations that found students to be punctual, respectful, effective communicators, professional, and using appropriate language also found the agency-client working relationships to be useful and experienced higher levels of satisfaction. Organizations that found students polite also experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the working relationship. Fam and Waller (2008) emphasize that factors such as commitment, honesty, and trust are extremely important for successful agency-client working relationships. Barrientos (2010) and Horning et al. (2020) describe community partners stressing the importance of trust in SL relationships. In a survey conducted by the author, more than half the community partners indicated high levels of trust with the students and academic staff members. Schachter and Schwartz (2009) cite one community partner as saying, "We had a great team: very professional, well-organised and flexible. Also, they conveyed a respect for our organization which was appreciated and also helped us approach the work enthusiastically and made us open to the recommendations forwarded. Smart group who I bet have since gone on to great things".

Sprague and Hu (2015) document that participating organizations described student groups as very knowledgeable, enthusiastic, creative, responsive, focused, hardworking, talented, insightful, productive, professional, smart, and compassionate. Vizenor et al. (2017) and Balfour (2020) indicate that community partners found working with students "very enjoyable" because of their innovative and out-of-the-box thinking, their fresh insights, valuable strategic recommendations, as well as their enthusiasm, optimism, commitment, and energy. Mitchell (2018) similarly describe small businesses' appreciation for the fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, energy, and creativity of students. Plaut (2013) records that partner organizations were grateful for the respect they received from students.

The CPUT Marketing Department SLP agency-client working relationships were found to have a statistically significant relationship with perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction and future participation. Organizations that found the agency-client working relationship to be useful also felt that the relationship had a significant lasting impact on the firm and therefore also experienced higher levels of satisfaction with the relationships as well as with the overall SLP. These small business organizations were consequently more willing to participate in the SLP again in the future. Sprague and Hu (2015) claim that most of the clients surveyed reported a lasting impact resulting from

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the student projects in the SLP, and 80 per cent of community partners surveyed by Vizenor et al. (2017) said that they would recommend SLP to other organizations. In some cases cited by Plaut (2013), students continued with the organizations and some functioned as volunteer managers or SL interns by recruiting new groups of students to serve the mission of the organization, as volunteers or service learners after the SLP. Barr (2010) notes that marketing students continued to serve community partners even after the SLP had ended. So do Fraustino et al. (2019) saying that the students come back as service learners, volunteers, interns, or staff. Barrientos (2010) chronicles a 61 per cent overall satisfaction rating by community partners for the level and quality of the working relationships with students, as well as a 67 per cent satisfaction rating with the quality of student work. Sprague and Hu (2015) conclude that only 10 per cent of clients surveyed were not interested in participating in the SLP again because of a breakdown in their relationship with the students, while Simola (2009) observes that, generally speaking, small businesses are willing to participate in SL again in the future, which is in line with the findings of this study.

Small businesses that work with student agencies which exhibit high levels of professionalism, skill, creativity, and enthusiasm register greater levels of usefulness and satisfaction in their working relationships with students (Vasbinder & Koehler, 2015; Mitchell, 2018). In order to ensure that student agencies function at high levels of professionalism and skill, student agencies need to be well trained before small business organizations are included in SLPs. Students should therefore engage in agency-client working relationship etiquette and agency creative strategy workshops within their student agencies in the initial stages of the SLP. The goal of these workshops should be for each student agency to establish its own agency protocols and processes for professional and skillful practice. In addition, each student agency should be evaluated by participating small businesses on key points of professionalism and skillful practice after each phase of the programme. Agencies should then participate in ongoing workshops with course coordinators and industry experts to gain insights and improve their professional and creative practice. At the end of each workshop, each agency should develop an action plan with key steps to be implemented in the next phase of the programme.

In order to ensure that student agencies are properly motivated and engage enthusiastically, it is recommended that course coordinators allocate students to industries in a small business sector which interest them. Sprague and Hu (2015) quote a client as saying: "it's really the quality of the students and their interest in the topic that makes a project worthwhile."

Participating community partner client organizations (small businesses) that built effective working relationships with the student agencies found that the relationship was more useful to them and had a longer-lasting impact on their firm, especially when students continued to work with them after the completion of the programme (Barr, 2010; Barrientos, 2010; Fraustino et al., 2019; Plaut, 2013; Vizenor et al., 2017). These firms also experienced high levels of satisfaction with the working relationship and with the overall SLP, and are thus very likely to participate in SL again in the future (Barrientos, 2010; Plaut, 2013; Sprague & Hu, 2015; Vizenor et al., 2017).

Having students form effective relationships with community partner client organizations are the foundation of a successful small business SLP. For this reason, programme coordinators need to go to great lengths to ensure that effective agency-client working relationships are formed and maintained for the duration of the programme. Considering that most small business organizations do not have the funds to pay for the services of marketing agencies and are therefore unlikely to have much experience of working with them, and considering that most students do not have agency work experience, both students and community partner client organizations need to be trained in agency-client working relationship theory, etiquette, and practice in order to ensure the success of the relationship during the SLP.

Once the agency-client working relationships have been appropriately established they need to be keenly monitored by course coordinators through regular check-ins. In addition, both community

partner client organizations and student agencies need to evaluate their relationship according to specific criteria after each phase of the programme. This evaluation should be shared with all parties involved and pathways for improvement should be discussed in a meeting facilitated by course coordinators. This process-oriented approach to student agency-SL community partner working relationships can also ensure that should small business organizations and students desire to continue working together after the conclusion of the programme, they will have the skills to do so.

In summary, the study found that most of the community partner client organizations were satisfied with the agency-client working relationships, which the student agencies had established with them during the course of the SLP. The community partner client organizations also showed favorable perceived usefulness, lasting impact, overall satisfaction and future participation regarding the agency-client working relationships fostered by the student agencies.

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