


Service-Learning for the acquisition of musical skills in future teachers

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ENG Abstract: Service Learning (SL) is a learning strategy characterised by the fact that participants provide a service to the community and simultaneously learn curricular content. Based on this, the aim of this work was to evaluate the effectiveness of SL in future teachers during the experience, and the enhancement of musical competences. A concurrent mixed-method triangulation design was carried out, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques simultaneously. This purposive sample included 52 students from the Double Degree in Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy at a public university in Spain. The information was collected by a questionnaire which measured competences related with Music Education of future Early Childhood Education teachers, and a self-assessment of the SL experience. Furthermore, the reflective records consisting of questions related to different moments of the experience. The results show that the students' musical competence improves significantly after going through the SL experience, both the self-assessment and the reflective records reaffirmed the effectiveness of the service with special emphasis on personal, social and academic-professional development. This research shows the multidimensional impact of SL in the university context regarding improved musical learning, but also enhanced teaching competence, professional identity and personal development of the students.

Keywords: service learning, music education, teaching competences, future teachers, concurrent triangulation mixed design.

ES Aprendizaje-Servicio para la adquisición de competencias musicales en futuros maestros

Resumen: El Aprendizaje-Servicio (ApS) es una estrategia de aprendizaje caracterizada porque los participantes dan un servicio a la comunidad al mismo tiempo que aprenden contenidos curriculares. El objetivo de este trabajo fue evaluar la efectividad del ApS en futuros docentes para mejorar sus competencias musicales, y analizar la experiencia vivida durante el servicio. Se llevó a cabo un diseño mixto de triangulación concurrente donde se integran técnicas de análisis cuantitativas y cualitativas de manera simultánea. Se trata de una muestra intencional de 52 estudiantes del Doble Grado de Educación Infantil y Pedagogía de una universidad pública en España. La información fue recogida mediante un cuestionario de competencias relativas a Educación Musical y a través de una autoevaluación del ApS, además se analizaron registros reflexivos con preguntas relativas a los diferentes momentos de la experiencia. Los resultados muestran que la competencia musical de los estudiantes mejora significativamente tras pasar por la experiencia de ApS, tanto la autoevaluación como los registros reflexivos reafirmaron la eficacia del servicio con especial énfasis en el desarrollo personal, social y académico-profesional. Esta investigación muestra el impacto multidimensional del ApS en el ámbito universitario referido a la mejora del aprendizaje musical y en la competencia docente, la identidad profesional y el desarrollo personal de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje servicio, educación musical, competencia docente, futuros maestros, diseño mixto de triangulación concurrente.

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1. Introduction

The Service-Learning (SL) didactic model is a global phenomenon due to its capacity to integrate educational, social, and emotional aspects, among others (Redondo & Fuentes, 2020), as well as for providing benefits to all participants involved in the experience (Salam *et al.*, 2019). The social commitment fostered through this approach is grounded in a concrete, everyday experience, responding to the growing need to implement holistic learning methodologies connected to current social realities (Do *et al.*, 2024). Its main academic value lies in the fact that it does not focus solely on the acquisition of curriculum-based knowledge, but also promotes the development of critical capacities (Chiva-Bartoll & Gil, 2018; Putra *et al.*, 2024), which are essential in individuals' social, professional, and personal lives.

In this regard, Deeley (2016) points out that some of the benefits of this model are that students develop: (1) a stronger sense of citizenship, (2) accelerated intellectual growth, and (3) remarkable personal development, since each individual who undertakes it has the opportunity to deepen both their own beliefs and their social and ethical values. It is therefore an academic endeavor that, in a practical way, provides a service to the community (Maddox & Trost, 2024), based on reciprocity and mutual support (Salam *et al.*, 2019).

Focusing on the field of music education, the vast majority of SL projects are implemented in higher education, although there are experiences at other educational levels (Yorio & Ye, 2012). Thus, Batlle Suñer *et al.* (2022) point out that it is in Early Childhood Education where it should begin to be applied, with certain restrictions due to the age of the participants; furthermore, they emphasize the need to implement such projects in collaborative and empathetic contexts. For her part, Gómez Cano (2018) argues that classroom work aimed at developing competent citizens should start at this stage, since students are capable of transferring and applying their knowledge to real-life situations, making the implementation of this type of SL strategy feasible.

According to Chiva-Bartoll *et al.* (2019), the results of university-based proposals in relation to the recipients demonstrate the successful acquisition of musical learning, as well as personal and social competencies. For all these reasons, the SL methodology has gained prominence in recent years, with proposals in Music Education emerging from different perspectives and social and geographical contexts (Camus *et al.*, 2023; Choi, 2020).

1.1. SL to develop didactic-musical competencies in future teachers

The European Union's position regarding the importance of Music Education is unequivocal and has been shaping the path toward its integration into the curricula of compulsory education stages (López-García & Valle, 2016). In the Spanish context, it is the specialist Music teacher who is responsible for the subject and must therefore have specific training. However, the current legislative framework within the European Higher Education Area concerning the musical education of future teachers does not provide adequate preparation, despite advocating for musically competent teachers regardless of their specialization (Grey, 2022; Sempere-Comas & Gisbert-Cervera, 2023). Students' own perceptions of their competence to plan and implement music education sessions reveal that they do not feel prepared (Bautista & Ho, 2022; Sirek & Sefton, 2024). This lack of confidence in their musical abilities sometimes leads to limited use of music in basic education classrooms or to the demand for further musical training (Grey, 2022).

In this regard, the SL model emerges as a catalyst for academic learning (Gillanders *et al.*, 2018; Yorio & Ye, 2012), fostering an improvement in students' attitudes toward their own learning (Lin, 2021; Yoo, 2023) and acting as a facilitator in the planning of musical activities in real contexts (Eutsler *et al.*, 2023), which sometimes even extend to international settings (Chambers & Lavery, 2022; Kearney *et al.*, 2024).

SL contributes to equipping future teachers with musical competencies (Mercado *et al.*, 2023) and to improving their musical and pedagogical learning (Bonastre *et al.*, 2021; Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019; Gillanders *et al.*, 2018), which, in turn, leads to increased confidence in their teaching practice (Koops, 2022), fostering critically reflective listeners (Georgii-Hemming *et al.*, 2020).

However, some of the difficulties that the SL model in music education generally based on social-educational musical practices (Chiva-Bartoll *et al.*, 2019), must face are those related to time costs, organizational complexity, and the amount of resources required to implement effective training strategies outside the classroom (Chambers & Lavery, 2022).

1.2. SL to implement musical content for child beneficiaries

For Moliner *et al.* (2022), SL in Music Education is grounded in its potential to offer all participants musical experiences from a social-educational perspective. These scholars consider this pedagogical model

suitable for the development of students' musical content knowledge and skills, while also being ideal for fostering critical and socially responsible thinking through sound-based art. In this vein, Parejo *et al.* (2020) implemented a SL project over four academic years (from 2016 to 2020) aimed at enriching recess time through musical activities in seven schools in Spain. The results revealed improvements in fundamental skills related to singing, listening, movement, and coordination, while also contributing to the preservation of musical folklore in particular and cultural heritage in general. From the perspective of those who design SL projects, it is important to note, as Chiva-Bartoll *et al.* (2019) report through a systematic review of the literature, that careful consideration must be given to the musical content to be implemented, both for those providing and those receiving the service, linking the competencies of this area with the service procedure. Thus, musical content will depend both on the type of service and on the educational level of the group with whom the project is to be carried out. Therefore, most experts agree that this pedagogical model is useful for fostering musical competencies among children because: (a) young recipients perceive it as something external to their school context, rather than as something imposed; (b) it enhances the sense of play that often characterizes musical activities; and (c) it strengthens the emotional bond that children establish with those delivering the service (Moledo *et al.*, 2021; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Based on these ideas, the general objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of SL in future teachers for improving their musical competencies, as well as to analyze the experience lived through the service.

2. Method

2.1. Design

This study follows a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), combining the use of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This type of design seeks to confirm, correlate, or corroborate different findings through the integration of data of diverse nature. In our case, it is a quasi-experimental pretest-post-test design without a control group (Gopalan *et al.*, 2020), in which reflective journals are used. This methodology was chosen because SL has a multidimensional impact, making it possible to combine the study of quantifiable phenomena with more subjective ones, thereby providing greater validity to the results (Bonastre *et al.*, 2021; González-Rabanal & Acevedo, 2023; Hou, 2022).

2.2. Sample

The sample was selected through non-probability convenience sampling and consisted of a total of 50 students enrolled in the Double Degree in Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy at a Spanish public university. However, its size varies depending on the data collection instrument, due to experimental attrition.

Thus, for the instrument measuring Competencies in Music Education, 42 students were matched (pre-post). Of these, 92.9% were women, all of Spanish nationality, with an age range between 18 and 27 years and a mean age of 19.56 (SD=1.484). A total of 45.2% were employed, and 97.6% had prior experience in SL. Regarding the SL Self-Assessment instrument, the total sample consisted of 43 participants, of whom 95.3% were women and the remainder men, with a mean age of 19.85 years (SD=1.610) and an age range between 19 and 28 years. As for the reflective journals, a total of 50 were analyzed, 96% written by women and 4% by men, with a mean age of 19.77 years (SD=1.388).

2.3. Instruments and data collection techniques

The data collection instruments used were as follows:

1. Competencies in music education of future early childhood teachers (Bonastre *et al.*, 2021), consisting of a total of 37 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly agree. These items are organized into two subscales: (a) Acquired didactic-musical knowledge related to Early Childhood Education (22 items, $\alpha_{pre}=0.845$; $\alpha_{post}=0.947$); and (b) Didactic musical applications for Early Childhood students (15 items, $\alpha_{pre}=0.886$; $\alpha_{post}=0.920$). The overall reliability obtained was 0.887 in the pretest and 0.958 in the post-test.
2. University SL experience self-assessment instrument, developed by López-de-Arana *et al.* (2020), consisting of a total of 41 items with five-point Likert-type response options, ranging from 1=Never to 5=Always. These items are organized into four dimensions: prior to experience stage (2 items), experience planning stage (21 items), experience implementation stage (5 items), and closure and dissemination stage (17 items). The overall reliability of the questionnaire with the sample used was 0.972.
3. Reflective journals, consisting of 14 questions related to the different stages of the experience (before=4, during=8, after=2), addressing: description of the service, motivation, social interaction, inclusion, learning, knowledge, and overall evaluation of the experience.

2.4. Description of the SL experience

The project originated from the need to improve social inclusion and prevent psycho-social risk factors among children at a public Early Childhood and Primary Education school in Madrid. It was implemented within the course "Music Didactic in Early Childhood Education" of the Double Degree in Early Childhood Education and Pedagogy.

With the support of the school management team, the teaching staff and families were informed, and consent was obtained to implement the intervention proposal. Before beginning the experience, a training workshop on the SL methodology was conducted for both the university students and the teachers receiving the service. The teaching methodology implemented in the university classroom was experiential and collaborative in nature. The services were carried out once a week throughout the second semester of the 2022-23 academic year, in small groups of approximately five university students, with visits lasting around 50 minutes each. The university students attended punctually the assigned areas in the school playground, where they proposed and guided playful musical activities, some of which had an intercultural and interdisciplinary character. To ensure better organization and interaction, they worked with the children by dividing them into smaller groups of approximately 20 participants each. The activities varied at each visit to the school, drawing on the knowledge acquired at the university regarding the application of musical elements during the corresponding developmental stage of early childhood. They primarily implemented games involving songs and movement, the performance of Orff instruments and sound objects, as well as sound discrimination activities and the improvisation of musical sequences related to emotional expression. Before attending the school, the students had prepared sound objects to support the activities, such as ribbons with bells to tie around the children's wrists, cut-outs of colored cardboard, balloons filled with different materials attached to popsicle sticks, and colored scarves.

2.5. Data analysis technique

Mixed data collection techniques were used in order to capture both the learning outcomes and experiences lived by the students during the SL project, thus allowing for a richer understanding of its impact (Camilli *et al.*, 2021; Hou, 2022). Data was collected before, during, and at the end of the experience.

Prior to conducting the quantitative analyses, and as recommended by Strunk and Mwavita (2024), the assumption of normality was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk statistics, as well as Q–Q plots. The absence of normality in the data led to the use of the non-parametric Wilcoxon test to compare pre- and post-test results in the instrument measuring Competencies in Music Education. In addition, the effect size was calculated using the *r* statistic (Kraft, 2020), interpreted as follows: values below 0.1 indicate negligible effects; between 0.1 and 0.29, small effects; between 0.3 and 0.5, medium effects; and above 0.5, large effects (Cohen, 1988). Data was analysed using SPSS 21.0 with a 95% confidence level.

For the qualitative analysis of the reflective journals, similarities among ideas, concepts, and themes were identified (Hatch, 2023). The data set was coded through several readings and phases (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). In the first phase, researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and rereading each reflection and noting initial ideas. In the second phase, the initial codes were compared with excerpts from the texts. In the third and final phase, codes were grouped into categories, which were refined in light of the questions and themes addressed in the reflective journal (description of the service, motivation, social interaction, inclusion, learning, knowledge, and evaluation of the experience).

Excerpts from reflective journals were identified using the abbreviation RR followed by a number corresponding to each student. The analysis of the reflective journals complemented the data collected through the service self-assessment. All qualitative analysis was conducted with the support of Atlas.ti 8 software.

3. Results

The results obtained are presented below.

Effectiveness of SL in Competencies in Music Education (Quantitative Analysis)

As shown in Table 1, the results reveal that the service was effective and that a clear improvement in musical competencies occurred once the students completed the service. Significant differences were found in all items in favor of the post-test, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1. Differences Before and After the Service

Variables	Pre (SD) ₁	Post (SD)	Z (p)	r
Basic psychological processes in Early Childhood Education	3.00 (0.904)	4.00 (0.871)	-4.674 (0.000)	-0.721
Didactic-musical methodologies	3.00 (1.164)	4.00 (0.679)	-4.007 (0.000)	-0.618
Types of didactic associations	3.00 (0.905)	4.00 (0.815)	-4.494 (0.000)	-0.693
Basic resources for vocal interpretation	3.00 (0.908)	4.00 (0.977)	-4.418 (0.000)	-0.682
Rhythmic resources	3.50 (1.04)	5.00 (0.707)	-4.327 (0.000)	-0.668
Basic procedures for active listening	3.00 (0.909)	5.00 (1.079)	-4.135 (0.000)	-0.638
Possibilities of dance and movement	4.00 (0.939)	5.00 (0.905)	-3.608 (0.000)	-0.557
Expressive possibilities of sound for communicating basic emotions	4.00 (1.192)	5.00 (0.643)	-4.104 (0.000)	-0.633
Communication of basic feelings through instruments and sounds	4.00 (1.011)	5.00 (0.582)	-3.933 (0.000)	-0.607

Variables	Pre (SD) ₁	Post (SD)	Z (p)	r
Musical question-answer phrases	3.00 (0.871)	4.00 (1.096)	-4.336 (0.000)	-0.669
Soundscapes with everyday sounds to express feelings and emotions	3.00 (1.166)	4.00 (0.827)	-4.574 (0.000)	-0.706
Musical repertoire from different cultures, countries, ethnicities, and social groups	3.00 (0.846)	4.00 (1.071)	-4.446 (0.000)	-0.686
Basic musical features of different cultures, countries, ethnicities, and social groups	3.00 (0.925)	4.00 (1.185)	-3.651 (0.000)	-0.563
Native musical instruments from different cultures, countries, ethnicities, and social groups	2.50 (0.811)	4.00 (1.050)	-4.479 (0.000)	-0.691
Dances from different cultures, countries, ethnicities, and social groups	3.00 (0.863)	4.00 (1.038)	-3.743 (0.000)	-0.578
Repertoire of universal musical pieces adapted to students	3.00 (1.008)	4.00 (0.781)	-3.970 (0.000)	-0.613
Repertoire of renowned composers	3.00 (0.935)	4.00 (0.938)	-4.127 (0.000)	-0.637
Training on ICT and TAC	3.00 (0.980)	4.50 (1.032)	-4.025 (0.000)	-0.621
Historical musical knowledge of listening activities	3.00 (1.065)	4.00 (0.916)	-4.835 (0.000)	-0.746
Activities to explore and identify soundscapes	3.00 (0.752)	5.00 (0.707)	-4.472 (0.000)	-0.690
You can create activities to differentiate types of sound contexts	4.00 (0.808)	5.00 (0.735)	-4.185 (0.000)	-0.646
You can create activities to promote musical experiences outside the classroom	4.00 (0.881)	5.00 (0.562)	-3.983 (0.000)	-0.615
You can create activities to integrate music education within the three areas of knowledge	4.00 (0.951)	5.00 (0.643)	-4.693 (0.000)	-0.724
You are prepared to propose activities to explore vocal sound possibilities	4.00 (1.002)	4.50 (0.977)	-2.751 (0.006)	-0.424
You are prepared to propose activities to discriminate and produce sounds of conventional and non-conventional instruments	4.00 (0.852)	4.50 (0.846)	-3.502 (0.000)	-0.540
You can propose activities using the body to design gestures and choreographies according to music	4.00 (0.784)	5.00 (0.549)	-3.421 (0.001)	-0.528
You can design stories to explain sound qualities	4.00 (0.952)	5.00 (0.857)	-3.936 (0.000)	-0.607
You can set children's texts to music	4.00 (0.892)	5.00 (0.707)	-4.052 (0.000)	-0.625
You can compose basic children's songs	3.00 (0.952)	5.00 (0.884)	-4.288 (0.000)	-0.662
You can use teaching materials for musical expression, comprehension and communication	4.00 (0.653)	5.00 (0.508)	-4.081 (0.000)	-0.630
You can use didactic-musical materials	4.00 (0.667)	5.00 (0.706)	-4.534 (0.000)	-0.700
You can use ICT and TAC as teaching resources in the classroom	4.00 (0.919)	4.50 (0.797)	-3.428 (0.001)	-0.529
Dimension: Acquired didactic-musical knowledge	3.22 (0.460)	4.27 (0.586)	-5.417 (0.000)	-0.836
Dimension: Musical didactic applications	3.73 (0.446)	4.53 (0.486)	-4.776 (0.000)	-0.737

Note: In the table, the pre- and post-values refer to the median, and the standard deviation is shown in parentheses.

Self-Assessment of SL and Reflective Journals (Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data)

On the other hand, regarding the SL self-assessment (Annex 1), more than 60% of the students consider that the experience "Always" motivates other groups to participate in new SL projects (P39¹, 67.4%). They also report that it helps to establish objectives related to values (P11, 65.1%), define roles and functions to be carried out by the participants (students, community partners, faculty) (P13, 62.8%), foresee the material and human resources needed to implement the service (P19, 62.8%), and encourages collective celebration with all the agents involved (P40, 62.8%). Likewise, the community is willing to continue collaborating in the service-learning experience (P37, 65.1%), and all participants contribute to the planning of the service to be carried out (P4, 60.5%).

In this regard, the reflective journals highlight that the lived experience encourages others to enjoy and benefit from it, but also motivates students to want to repeat it in future courses and subjects (RR-23²), because it enables meaningful and continuous learning, as the students state: "Very good, with a great desire to carry out more experiences like this, since the theoretical can be put into practice, making learning meaningful" (RR-15). Additionally, it represents a simulation of their future profession: "It has been a very enriching experience and an opportunity to approach my future profession as a teacher" (RR-7). They report gaining experience, being able to apply previous knowledge, increasing motivation to study at university, facing real

situations, getting to know how the school operates, and being required to put what they have learned into practice.

Students emphasize the dual nature of SL: giving and receiving, as reflected in the following excerpt:

I find it a very enriching activity for both sides, since on one hand you foster personal growth in every aspect, encouraging self-esteem, effort, work, and cooperation. And, on the other hand, you offer a resource that allows children to have fun while acquiring new knowledge at the same time (RR-3).

Among the values mentioned are companionship, respect, helpfulness, collaboration, and mutual learning: "The cooperation that children show among themselves, as well as their eagerness to learn, makes me put all my effort into doing it and into listening to them" (RR-27); "I believe it has awakened in me the feeling and desire to help, to cooperate, and to motivate others to contribute as well, since working together we can achieve great things" (RR5); or "I think both parties benefit and very strong emotional bonds are formed when you help and feel helped at the same time" (RR50). Developing active listening and an active attitude, promoting participation and socialization, awakening the desire and interest to learn, and strengthening bonds of friendship were also associated with positive emotional states.

Celebration is expressed both with classmates for the work accomplished: "how well we did it" (RR21); "we worked very well" (RR2); "we made it" (RR50); and in gratitude for the kind treatment and warm welcome received from the school's teachers, as well as in the sharing of happiness, joy, gratification, and a sense of fortune for having lived the experience. They insist that passion and vocation for the profession are reaffirmed in and through the service:

I have felt fortunate and filled with great excitement for the future that awaits me (RR37).

I feel very grateful that we were offered this opportunity and that we were able to have this experience (RR18).

Furthermore, every time something practical is carried out, confidence increases, and as a result practical experiences become more rewarding and effective (RR29).

Also, all the teachers at the school treat you very well, and that is something to be grateful for (RR20).

Around 50% of the students also state that the evaluation of SL "Always" aims to improve processes and outcomes (P26, 58.1%), is carried out at the beginning, during, and at the end of the experience (P27, 53.5%), and includes selfassessment (P31, 53.5%) as well as reflective activities on learning and service (P24, 51.2%; P14, 55.8%). Likewise, the questions most frequently rated at the highest level were associated with maintaining the confidentiality of the service recipients (P23, 55.8%), taking into account the strengths, resources, and limitations of the target group (P5, 51.2%), establishing clear curricular objectives (P9, 51.2%), and analyzing whether SL has fostered collaboration among participants (P35, 55.8%).

In fact, students are aware of how evaluation improves planning and detection of needs for interventions with students with special educational needs, organization of activities (e.g., from the simplest to the most complex) in their global and crosscurricular nature, recognition of different learning rhythms, the importance of playing and its relationship with musical activities, the ongoing updating of knowledge (e.g., continuous professional development), and the link between learning and students' interests. Similarly, SL encourages students to assess their strengths and weaknesses or areas for improvement. For example, "applying strategies to promote participation, learning to improvise" (RR25), accepting that "not everything turns out as expected" (RR10), "allowing oneself to fail" (RR30), and "learning from mistakes" (RR24). The experience also fostered collaboration among students, teachers, and the school-university partnership.

In their journals, the university students delivering the service reflect on the reasons why the expected results were not the same across the different groups of children, or on the importance of effectiveness of coordination, planning, and the child-school teacher relationship, as well as the relationship between school teachers and university students. They also highlight how SL "makes me selfevaluate" (RR3), or "put myself in someone else's shoes" (RR16), or "find the balance between what is planned and letting things flow" (RR48), the organization of classrooms into learning corners and projectbased work, or "how to overcome obstacles and keep going" (RR12) in order "to step out of one's comfort zone" (RR42).

SL fosters learning among all participating agents. School teachers discover new games and songs. For their part, university students learn from the feedback received from the course instructor, the schoolteachers, and their peers; from gaining knowledge about the school and how it operates; from observing how children follow rules and instructions; from applying practice in a real situation; and from advocating for the role of music in early childhood education. As for the children, they benefit by socializing with unfamiliar people, learning curricular content, taking on roles, learning new songs, coordinating rhythm and movement, and following instructions. Several reflections illustrate this:

Being able to learn from the teachers who were there (RR24).

The main reason was the positive feedback received, both from the instructor due to the experience of previous years and from peers who were going to the school and telling us about it (RR9).

Although the experience was very brief, I felt comfortable and welcomed by the school staff. In addition, after finishing the activities, we were able to see what the school was like and what its dynamics were (RR21).

Very good, you always feel calmer knowing that you have a university classmate next to you in case you need to ask something or simply talk to them about any issue that arises in the classroom (RR19).

In contrast, although SL continues to be evaluated positively, the percentage drops below 40% when students are asked whether they “Always” know the characteristics of the target group (P6, 34.9%) and whether they have received training on what SL is (P2, 37.2%). The same occurs with questions related to whether teachers self-evaluate their own practice throughout the different phases of the experience (P30, 32.6%), whether they seek information from the community about the development of the service at different moments (P29, 32.6%), or whether the budget and sources of funding are planned in accordance with the project’s financial availability (P21, 25.6%).

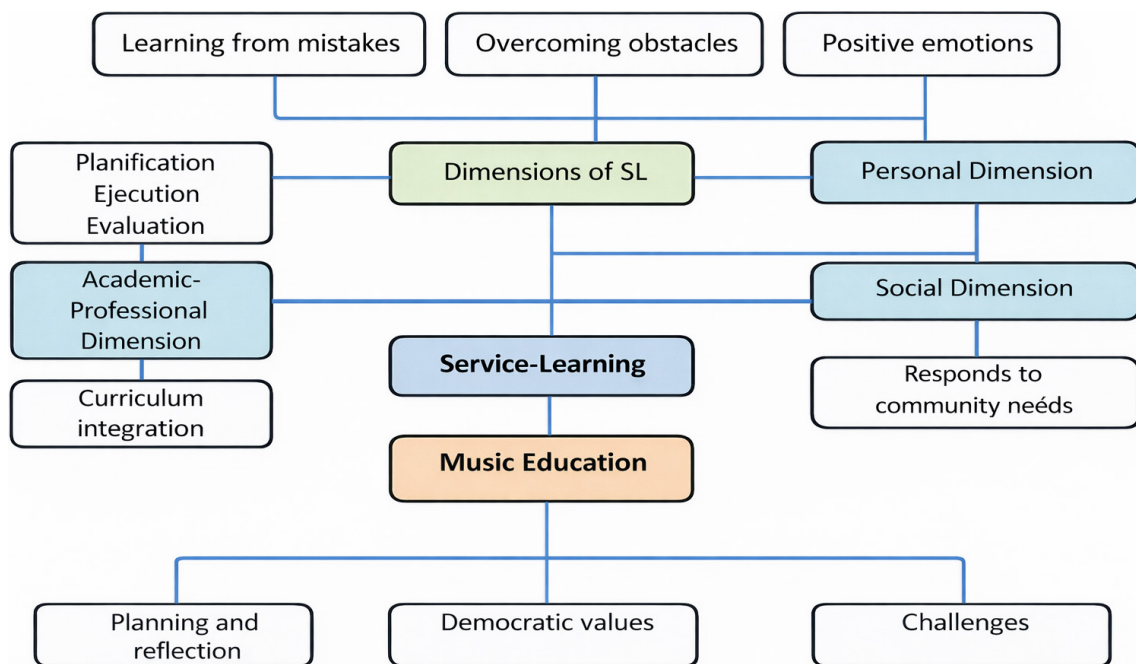
In this regard, students’ reflective journals explain that, although they had knowledge about the characteristics of the group of children who would receive the service, they were not always able to identify special educational needs in the children or understand why some exhibited disruptive behaviors. They also mention that the course instructor devoted the first sessions to explaining what SL is and how it differs from other types of service, such as volunteering, although they truly understood what the experience meant only once they lived it.

Consequently, in general terms, 37.7% of the questions were not evaluated with “Never” or “Almost never,” in contrast with 2.2% that were not evaluated with “Always,” a figure that once again confirms the positive assessment of the service as a whole. This is further evidenced by the fact that question 41, “Dissemination activities are carried out,” which received the highest percentage of “Never” responses, only reached 11.6%, followed by question 28, “The teacher provides feedback to students on their progress,” with 9.3%. The rest of the evaluations with this rating were below 7%.

Finally, 79% of students answered “Always” or “Almost always” that the course instructor asked about previous SL experiences (P1) before beginning the service. Meanwhile, during the service, 90.7% consider that reflective activities on learning and the service itself (P24) were carried out very frequently. In the closing stage, 90.7% report that collaboration among students, community partners, and teachers was promoted (P35), and that the experience motivates others to participate (P39).

Figure 1 summarizes the main findings from the self-assessment and reflective journals.

Figure 1. Main results of the self-assessment and reflective journals



4. Discussion

The findings regarding the benefits of SL align with previous research in which this type of experience has been integrated into the curriculum across various subjects (Redondo & Fuentes, 2024; Yorio & Ye, 2012), as well as specifically in the subject of music education, where improvements have also been observed in the acquisition of didactic-musical knowledge (Bonastre et al., 2021; Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2019; Eutsler et al., 2023).

Students reflected on how, building upon their prior knowledge, they were able to reach new meaningful learning outcomes through experiential processes, applying them in a real learning environment. As a result, they were capable of creating high-quality final musical products that were also appropriate for the beneficiaries. On a personal level, SL fosters intrinsic growth in students; on the social-emotional level, it strengthens interpersonal skills; and on the academic-professional level, SL translates into a more positive attitude towards learning and the acquisition of relevant professional competencies, in line with Rondo and Fuentes (2020).

Regarding the achievement of these outcomes, results indicate that this ecosystem of applied experiential learning, so different from traditional theoretical learning, has been reinforced by an increase in student motivation, which in turn has led to better acquisition of curricular knowledge and competencies. Considering this, it can be affirmed that this SL experience has contributed to improving the challenge described by various authors concerning the insufficient preparation of future early childhood teachers in Music Education and their lack of self-confidence when facing the demands of the profession (Bautista & Ho, 2022; Grey, 2022; Sirek & Sefton, 2024). In this regard, and in line with the findings of this study, Bautista and Ho (2022) note that both generalist and specialist teachers still need to integrate pedagogical strategies into their classroom practices, which will provide them with greater confidence when designing and implementing activities within their own school planning.

Thus, the results draw attention to the flourishing development of professional identity among Higher Education students; however, for this to fully materialize, not only time but also meaningful engagement is required (Sempere-Comas & Gisbert-Cervera, 2023).

Previous studies also highlight the need to improve both everyday and academically grounded communication skills in order to foster respect for different points of view, contribute to knowledge acquisition, and support problem-solving (Wagenaar, 2021). In the results presented here, students showed a strong predisposition toward proactive communication and collaboration among themselves, as well as with the course instructor, who provided them with ongoing feedback on the tasks carried out and facilitated discussions about them. Through this process, students became aware of their responses and sought new solutions, thereby developing curricular knowledge and communicative skills.

Results also indicate that, through this methodology, learning becomes holistic and influences students' personal development. They perceive themselves as having acquired values that are essential for their future professional practice, such as teamwork, flexibility in considering others' opinions, and a positive attitude (Choi, 2020). This capacity for dialogue contributes to strengthening active citizenship (Zayas Latorre *et al.*, 2019). Students consider that recording their reflections throughout the experience enhanced their ability to express themselves critically, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. In this regard, evaluation activities have become an important component of curricular learning and personal growth.

Furthermore, these results invite us to reflect on the importance of ensuring that, when these future educators enter professional practice, they are capable of transferring this type of learning methodology to their own classrooms. It has therefore been essential to contrast their perceptions that the effort required to design, organize, and implement these collaborative experiences with other institutions has been compensated by improvements in learning outcomes and by its positive and motivating impact on their classes. In addition, a positive reciprocity effect among the participating agents was observed, a key factor in collaborative work (Salam *et al.*, 2019).

5. Conclusions

The general objective of this study was grounded in a dual perspective. First, it aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of SL in future teachers regarding the improvement of their musical competencies.

The improvement in the acquisition of both specific and transversal competences emerged as one of the strongest outcomes of the study. In fact, significant differences were found in aspects related to the application of didactic strategies to enhance participation, the ability to adapt to the learning environment, and the importance of playing, among others, all of which showed improvement following the implementation of the service. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that such an increase in professional application must be linked to a deep understanding of the subject matter to be taught, and it is associated with the growth of students' perceptions of their own professional identity.

In relation to the second perspective of the study's primary objective, analyzing the lived experience within the service, it can be noted that, despite the challenge involved in implementing and analyzing this type of experience, it proved beneficial and useful for all parties involved: students, teachers, and researchers. Students' reflections highlight how the service positively impacted personal, social, emotional, and academic-professional dimensions. In this sense, beyond reinforcing teaching and musical competencies, the study and the didactic implementation in specific contexts helped students become aware of the multiplicity of factors that influence teaching-learning strategies and which, within the classroom as theoretical assumptions, could not be addressed, planned, or even fully perceived.

Finally, it is important to highlight certain limitations that must be taken into account. This study involved a small sample that was not randomly selected, which reduces the generalization of the findings. This is partly due to the fact that implementing an SL model requires prolonged attendance at the center where it takes place, an inherent limitation in itself. Moreover, constant variability in the individuals delivering the service is not always beneficial for those who receive it. For all these reasons, planning this pedagogical model in terms of the participants involved is, from the outset, a complex organizational task.

Another challenge associated with this type of project is the difficulty of collecting data from the beneficiaries. Because they are minors, the regulations and laws concerning data protection and the "care" of these individuals are strict regarding access to certain information, although they are less restrictive with respect to educational intervention itself.

In conclusion, the results obtained, consistent with the existing scientific literature, highlight that the teaching-learning process must take into account all social sectors in order to truly address contextual

reality. Moreover, the benefits derived from the SL experience extend not only to the group in which it is implemented but, most notably, to future teachers, at the competency-based, academic, and social levels.

Notes

1. Refers to the question number in the self-assessment questionnaire.
2. Refers to the reflective journal entry followed by a number corresponding to a student.

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Anexo 1. Appendix 1. Service-Learning Self-Assessment Questionnaire

N°	Preguntas del cuestionario autoevaluación	Nunca	Casi nunca	A veces	Casi siempre	Siempre
P1	El profesorado explora las experiencias previas del alumnado en aprendizaje-servicio y/o voluntariado		4.7	16.3	30.2	48.8
P2	El alumnado recibe formación sobre lo que es aprendizaje-servicio	2.3	9.3	14	37.2	37.2
P3	La experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio que se va a desarrollar parte de una necesidad identificada por los socios comunitarios		9.3	4.7	37.2	48.8
P4	Todos los participantes colaboran en la planificación del servicio a realizar (alumnado, socios comunitarios, profesorado)		2.3	7	30.2	60.5
P5	En la definición del servicio se tienen en cuenta las fortalezas, recursos y limitaciones del colectivo destinatario	2.3	7	9.3	25.6	51.2
P6	El alumnado conoce las características del colectivo destinatario del servicio (edad, género, nivel educativo, ocupación, cultura, nivel socio-económico, etc.)	2.3	14	11.6	30.2	34.9
P7	La experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio está integrada en el plan educativo de la entidad promotora		2.3	9.3	39.5	48.8
P8	Los objetivos de la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio se acuerdan entre los participantes (alumnado, socios comunitarios, profesorado)	4.7	7	4.7	37.2	46.5
P9	Se establecen objetivos curriculares claros	2.3	14	2.3	30.2	51.2
P10	Se establecen objetivos relacionados con la justicia social y el desarrollo sostenible tales como: equidad, inclusión, derechos humanos y sostenibilidad ambiental		11.6	14	30.2	44.2
P11	Se establecen objetivos relacionados con valores tales como: participación, cooperación, solidaridad y respeto		2.3	9.3	23.3	65.1
P12	Se establecen objetivos relacionados con la calidad del servicio, que ha de dar respuesta a la necesidad comunitaria		4.7	11.6	39.5	44.2
P13	Se definen los roles y funciones a realizar por los participantes (alumnado, socios comunitarios, profesorado)		4.7	9.3	20.9	62.8
P14	A lo largo de la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio se realizan actividades de reflexión sobre los aprendizajes y la calidad del servicio	2.3	7	11.6	23.3	55.8
P15	El profesorado es quien toma las decisiones sobre la planificación del servicio	2.3	4.7	4.7	39.5	
P16	Está planificado qué, cuándo y cómo se evalúa, y quién participa en la evaluación	2.3	9.3	14	23.2	48.8
P17	Se elabora un cronograma de actividades	2.3	4.7	14	30.2	46.5
P18	La temporalización de la experiencia es flexible (se adecua a las necesidades de los socios comunitarios y del alumnado)	2.3	9.3	11.6	32.6	41.9
P19	Se prevén los recursos materiales y personales para ejecutar el servicio		9.3	11.6	16.3	62.8
P20	Se prevén posibles colaboraciones entre instituciones	2.3	4.7	18.6	30.2	41.9
P21	Se prevé el presupuesto y las fuentes de financiación	7	9.3	32.6	25.6	25.6
P22	Durante la implementación del servicio se toman decisiones conjuntas	2.3	4.7	7	44.2	41.9
P23	Durante la realización del servicio se mantiene el principio ético de confidencialidad en relación a las personas destinatarias del servicio		2.3	9.3	30.2	55.8
P24	Se realizan actividades de reflexión sobre los aprendizajes y el servicio		4.7	4.7	39.5	51.2
P25	El profesorado promueve la reflexión sobre los roles y las responsabilidades acordadas	4.7	2.3	7	39.5	46.5
P26	La evaluación de la experiencia tiene como objetivo la mejora de los procesos y resultados	2.3		14	25.6	58.1
P27	La evaluación se realiza al inicio, durante y al final de la experiencia	4.7	4.7	16.3	20.9	53.5
P28	El profesorado ofrece retroalimentación al alumnado sobre su evolución	9.3	11.6	14	30.2	30.2
P29	El profesorado pide información a la comunidad sobre la evolución del servicio en diferentes momentos	2.3	11.6	23.3	30.2	32.6
P30	El profesorado autoevalúa su propia práctica en las distintas fases de la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio	7	9.3	16.3	32.6	32.6
P31	El alumnado se autoevalúa con relación a procesos y resultados	2.3	4.7	4.7	30.2	53.5
P32	La evaluación de la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio recoge las voces de todas las personas participantes (incluido el colectivo destinatario)	7	9.3	16.3	25.6	41.9
P33	Se analizan los aprendizajes adquiridos	2.3	9.3	11.6	30.2	46.5
P34	Se analiza si la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio contribuye a cuestionar prejuicios y estereotipos	2.3	4.7	16.3	30.2	44.2
P35	Se analiza si la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio ha fomentado la colaboración entre los participantes (alumnado, socios comunitarios, profesorado)		4.7	4.7	34.9	55.8
P36	Se analiza el grado de satisfacción del colectivo destinatario y de la comunidad con el servicio ofrecido	2.3		9.3	34.9	48.8
P37	La comunidad está dispuesta a seguir colaborando en la experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio			4.7	30.2	65.1
P38	La comunidad propone nuevas necesidades que podrían ser abordadas a través de futuras experiencias de aprendizaje-servicio		7	7	37.2	46.5
P39	La experiencia motiva a otros colectivos a participar en proyectos de aprendizaje-servicio	2.3	2.3	4.7	23.3	67.4
P40	Se celebra la experiencia de forma colectiva (destinatarios, alumnado, socios comunitarios y profesorado)	4.7	7	9.3	16.3	62.8
P41	Se realizan actividades de difusión	11.6	7	20.9	27.9	30.2

Note: The questionnaire has not been translated from Spanish to English because the original is validated in Spanish.