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Service-Learning Cultivates *Futuwwah* in Muslim Students

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Service-Learning Cultivates *Futuwwah* in Muslim Students

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Abstract

This article examines a cohort of 48 students enrolled in a community-based participatory action research and service-learning (CBPAR-SL) module. The purpose of the module was to enhance students' agency and empathy by applying their scriptural knowledge to create positive change. The research question that the article addresses is, "What is the influence of service-learning on students at an Islamic private higher education institute?" We used Mezirow's transformative learning process to examine the learning journey and experience of the students. The findings were that a service-learning module based on action research principles is a catalyst for student transformative learning, agency augmentation, the development of empathy, and the cultivation of *Futuwwah* in Muslim students.

Keywords: *agency, empathy, Futuwwah, Islam, service-learning*

Aprendizaje-Servicio cultiva la *Futuwwah* (Nobleza Espiritual) en los estudiantes musulmanes

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Resumen

Este artículo examina una estadística de 48 estudiantes matriculados en un módulo de Investigación Comunitaria Participativa y Aprendizaje-Servicio CBPAR-SL (siglas en Ingles). El objetivo del módulo era mejorar la capacidad de acción y la empatía de los estudiantes aplicando sus conocimientos del texto sagrado para generar un cambio positivo. La pregunta de investigación que aborda el artículo es: «¿Cuál es la influencia del Aprendizaje-Servicio en los estudiantes de un instituto privado de educación superior islámico?». Utilizamos el Proceso de Aprendizaje Transformador de Mezirow para examinar el trayecto y la experiencia de aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Las conclusiones fueron que un módulo de Aprendizaje-Servicio basado en los principios de Investigación-Acción favorecen en el aprendizaje transformador de los estudiantes, el aumento de la capacidad de acción, el desarrollo de la empatía y el cultivo de la *Futuwwah* (Nobleza Espiritual) en los estudiantes musulmanes.

Palabras clave: *Organismo, Empatía, Futuwwah, Islam, Aprendizaje-Servicio*

Editors' Note: Translation provided by Ms Shayma Shey Pereira.

Introduction

This article explores how service-learning (SL) premised on action learning precepts influenced young Muslim adults enrolled at an Islamic private higher education institute in Cape Town, South Africa. Many schools of Muslim religious studies often focus on theoretical knowledge and the memorization of scripture. Personal spiritual development and growth are also included as part of the curriculum. Overall, the students are taught Arabic and the various Islamic academic disciplines for personal practice and to be community teachers and prayer leaders. The Islamic faith tradition has a large community dimension. The faculty of Islamic studies recognized the gap between the classroom and the curriculum learning experience and how young people interact with their community. There is a gap between what is learned and how to implement and apply scriptural injunctions when returning to the community space. The faculty acknowledged that although studying Islam would make students prosocial, they felt that the graduates, young Muslim South African adults, needed to be actively apprenticed into living their faith. As a Muslim minority living in a democratic country, these young graduates need to be positive contributors and changemakers within their communities, both from a faith-based perspective and as citizens of South Africa. In addition to this, there is very little research on SL within Muslim educational institutes, as well as faith-based SL within an Islamic context. Thus, an SL module was piloted over 2 years.

The first cohort of students to complete the pilot community-based participatory action research and service-learning (CBPAR-SL) module consisted of 67 first-year students, and the second cohort consisted of 48 first-year students. A previous article by the authors focused on the first cohort (Jaffer & Bayat, 2023), and this article focuses on the second cohort. The purpose of the module was to enhance students' agency and develop empathy to apply their scriptural knowledge and to create positive change. The research question that is addressed in this article is, "What was the influence of SL on students at an Islamic private higher educational institute?" As we put this article together to answer the research question, a key concept that captured what was emerging from students' responses, which we took from the Islamic literature, was the concept of *Futuwwah*. *Futuwwah* is an Arabic word translated as spiritual chivalry (Aščerić-Todd, 2007). Senturk (2021) avers that it was developed by Muslim scholars to teach Muslim youth the Prophetic way of life and can be defined as applied ethics based on the life and tradition of Prophet Muhammad (salutations and peace be upon him). We explore this concept further in the "Discussion" section.

Literature Review

The nomenclature used when writing about student learning and development through engaging with a community is sometimes referred to as community-based learning (CBL), SL, or sometimes also referred to as community service-learning (CSL).

SL is a form of experiential learning. It takes the students beyond the confines of the classroom and allows them to engage with communities whom they will most likely be serving, working alongside them. As a pedagogical approach, it acts as a bridge connecting academia with the real world, providing students with valuable experiences that cannot be obtained solely from classroom learning (Bringle & Clayton, 2021). Butin (2010) argues that the focus on experiential learning and transformative elements is a key characteristic of CSL. Butin (2010) further asserts that CSL enables students to see how personal experience and their disciplinary knowledge can be connected with complex social issues.

Research shows that these modalities increase students' learning, development, social awareness, and ability to engage in addressing civic needs (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010; Mtawa et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2009). Through SL, students can develop empathy and compassion toward others. Additionally, SL improves students' communication, critical thinking (Hall & Morris-Compton, 2018), and problem-solving skills (Lenkauskaitė, 2020).

Devine et al. (2023), in an edited volume on SL and religious education, state that, particularly in the field of religious studies, SL offers encounters with the "other" that can profoundly challenge a student's self-understanding and their social awareness. In his research on the relationship between SL and the study of theology, Seider (2011) found that students who enrolled in an SL module showed a significant increase

in their interest in theology, had a greater desire to enroll in theology coursework, and developed a deeper interest in theology.

In their study on the student learning outcomes of SL, Yorio and Ye (2012) carried out a meta-analysis of more than 15 years of studies and found that SL had a statistically significant effect on students' "understanding of social issues" (p. 11). In other words, students became more prosocial. Stokamer (2011, p. 67) concluded that "the literature strongly indicates the potential of [service-learning] to develop civic competence." Furthermore, Marshall et al. (2015) have argued that SL has been effective in developing civic responsibility and social awareness in students. Bringle and Clayton (2021, p. 258) explain that civic engagement cultivates "partnerships that possess integrity and that emphasize participatory, collaborative, and democratic processes (e.g., design, implementation, assessment) that provide benefits to all [stakeholders]." In commenting on SL in non-Western cultural settings, DeMarais et al. (2022), who wrote about an online SL course for students of religion, made a persuasive argument that culturally relevant reflection is an important element of successful SL in non-Western cultural contexts such as Africa.

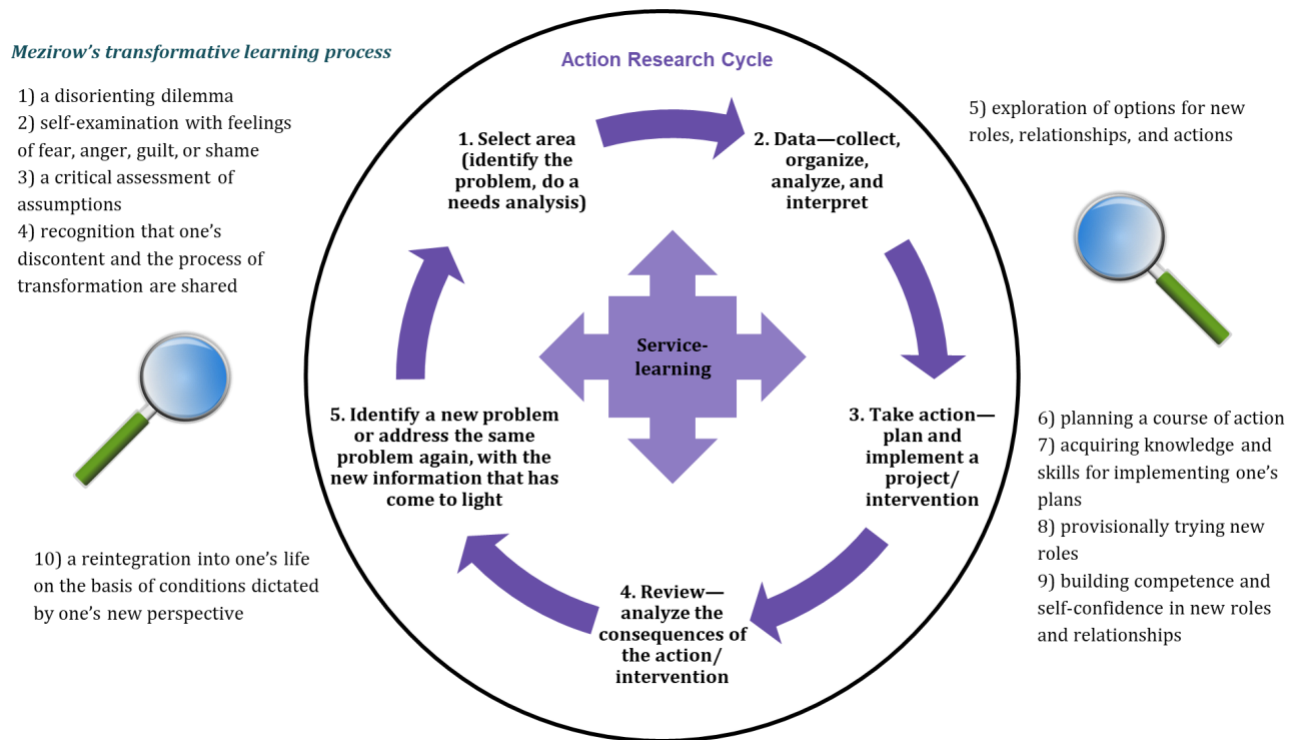
When students step into social settings different from their own, there is an opportunity for growth and transformation. Transformation refers to those psychological, cognitive, and social processes of learning and education that follow from a variety of reflective and maturing experiences (McWhinney & Markos, 2003, p. 18). This is where SL plays a role. It allows students to enter a new social setting that affords them new opportunities, which are hopefully transformative experiences.

Theoretical Framing of the Article and the Theoretical Underpinnings of the Pedagogical Approach

Mezirow, as Christie et al. (2015) argue, avers that every individual has a particular view of the world and that this becomes a habit of mind that cannot be easily changed except through a thorough and convincing argument. The theoretical framing for this study is Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning process. It includes the following nonsequential learning processes:

- a disorienting dilemma
- self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
- a critical assessment of assumptions
- recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
- exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- planning a course of action
- acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- provisionally trying new roles
- building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

Transformative learning theory focuses on critical learning for personal change (Mezirow, 2003). In Figure 1 and Table 1, Mezirow's transformative learning processes are aligned with the action research (AR) cycle students were taught in class, based on suggestions by Christie et al. (2015). Students were supported through the AR cycle (Jaffer & Bayat, 2023) to provide an enabling environment to stimulate them in the direction of Mezirow's transformative learning processes. The AR cycle in Figure 1 (adapted from Jaffer & Bayat, 2023) was the students' methodology. Students were provided with the AR cycle and guided through steps 1–5 (Jaffer & Bayat, 2023). Mezirow's transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) was the lens for the researchers' analysis.

**Figure 1.**

The Alignment of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) with the Action Research Cycle Adapted from Jaffer and Bayat (2023)

Table 1.

The Alignment of the Action Research Cycle (Students' Methodology) with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Process (Researchers' Framework for Analysis)

Service-Learning	
Action research cycle (adapted from Jaffer & Bayat, 2023)	Mezirow's transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)
<i>These are the steps that the students went through when embarking on their SL projects. They followed these steps to identify problems in their community and then address them. Action research was the methodology that the students used to execute their projects.</i>	<i>Mezirow's transformative learning process was the lens through which the students' experiences were understood. This framework was used to analyze the experience of the students as they went through the action research cycle*.</i>
1. Select area—identify the problem, do a needs analysis	1) a disorienting dilemma 2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame

	3) a critical assessment of assumptions 4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
2. Data—collect, organize, analyze, interpret	5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
3. Take action—plan and implement a project/intervention	6) planning a course of action 7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans 8) provisionally trying new roles 9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
4. Review—analyze the consequences of the action/intervention 5. Identify a new problem, or address the same problem again, with the new information that has come to light	10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective
<i>*Although we have paired specific steps of the action research cycle with specific steps in Mezirow's transformative learning process, it should be understood that there was an overlap between them. In other words, the transformative learning process happened across the action research cycle although in some steps it was more prominent.</i>	

One of the reasons this theoretical framework was chosen was that the key element of the transformative learning theory, a disorienting dilemma, is a disruption, opening the opportunity for empathic orientation. This is also an opportunity for students to be exposed to the internal tussle of the *nafs* (hedonistic self¹) and the *'aql* (reason) as described in the human ontological paradigm of multiplexity. The disorientation serves as a catalyst to help individuals reconsider their framing of reality both intrinsically and extrinsically. Cranton (2002) describes it as an “activating event.” It allowed for internal reflection on core aspects of the Islamic faith (such as social responsibility, compassion, and human rights) and facilitated transformation through action. Mezirow (1981) explains the disorienting dilemma as those occasions when the individual “becomes critically conscious of how and why our habits of perception, thought, and action have distorted the way we have defined the problem and ourselves in relationship to it” (p. 65). DeAngelis (2022) describes it as “when new information challenges what one has known to be true” (p. 590) and further defines “the disorienting dilemma as the disjuncture between what one has known to be true and new ways of knowing” (p. 587). As humans, our knowledge is always partial, and through interaction in the world, particularly when we stumble upon new information or new settings or a question that we do not immediately have an answer for—we generally work toward resetting our understanding of the issues at hand.

Methodology

The systematic way the research was conducted for this article, that is, its methodology, is a case study, with the boundaries of the case study being the SL module. A case study allows for the study of the SL phenomenon in its real-life context, which can lead to rich, empirical descriptions and the development of theory (Yin, 2017). A research paradigm² provides a study's ontology, epistemology, axiology, and

¹We have opted to translate the word *nafs* as hedonistic self. Generally, the term *nafs* is translated as the lower self and is similar to the ego (Rothman, 2020).

²Saunders et al. (2023) prefer to use philosophy instead of paradigm.

methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which provide the foundational beliefs of the researchers. In this study, it is the multiplexity paradigm advocated by Senturk et al. (2020) that is used. Multiplexity is an alternative paradigm³ rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition and is a multilevel framework for the study of human action and society. It also explains how Muslim scholars of the past bridged the science-and-religion chasm (Senturk et al., 2020). It is used in this article to incorporate the normative value systems from the Islamic faith tradition into the authors' research practice. Epistemology, ontology, and axiology are often unspoken assumptions about knowledge, whereas most researchers will highlight the methodology of their research study. The ontological foundation of the multiplexity paradigm is that Muslims conceptualize reality as having *marātib al-wujūd* or, as translated into English, *levels of existence*. These levels include (a) the physical or visible realm (*mulk*), (b) the ideal or invisible or metaphysical realm (*malakūt*), and (c) the divine realm (*lāhūt*). In terms of human ontology, from a multiplex perspective, a human being comprises body, mind, and soul, where human action is a "joint production" of the three.⁴ All three elements work together to produce a human act with the soul as the supervisor. Subsequently, the soul comprises reason (*'aql*) and the hedonistic self (*nafs*), and they are conceptualized as being in constant struggle for controlling human decision-making and action (Centre for Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 2022). However, in this tussle, the best outcome is a refinement of the soul when the hedonistic self-submits to reason, but for most people, the tussle remains an ongoing feature of their lives (Senturk, 2022). In terms of epistemology, within the multiplexity paradigm, knowledge can be acquired via reason, sense perception, intuition, and divine revelation, which is referred to as *marātib al-'ulūm* or *levels of knowledge*. From the multiplexity paradigm, axiology refers to the values and beliefs that researchers bring to their work and how those values shape their research and interpretations. For the authors of this article, Islamic values such as accepting the existence of God, being servants of God, minimizing harm, and honesty are all key values in their research.

Setting and Participants

Students in the first year of the undergraduate Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Islamic Studies program and the 1-year Islamic Sciences program were enrolled in the second cohort of the CBPAR-SL module within an Islamic Institute in Cape Town, South Africa. The institute, as of the publishing of this article, has only an Islamic studies faculty. South Africa has a small Muslim population which constitutes "two percent of South Africa's population and in Cape Town between 5 and 10 percent of the city's inhabitants" (Jacobs, 2021, p. 25). They are nevertheless active within the country with many mosques, educational institutions, and socially oriented Islamic organizations. The first cohort of students went through a 6-month program (Jaffer & Bayat, 2023). Based on feedback and recommendations from the first cohort, the duration of the program for the second cohort was extended to 10 months.

The institute approved the module and the recruitment of students to participate in the module. All ethical guidelines were adhered to with the permission of the institute. All participating students were over the age of 18. Students enrolled in the program were made aware of the research both verbally and via documentation in the form of a module guide. Students signed a consent form for video recordings and photography and were asked for informed consent when they completed the module feedback forms. Students were assured of anonymity and confidentiality both verbally and on the feedback form. There were no consequences for students who opted out of participating in the feedback, and it did not affect their academic standing. Feedback forms are being kept in a secure cloud storage server and will be deleted after 5 years.

Data Gathering

Students were taught an AR model (Jaffer & Bayat, 2023). Students were required to reflect on why it is important to address social issues and come up with ideas on how to tackle some of these challenges.

³The dominant paradigms are positivism, interpretivism, and critical approaches (Saunders et al., 2023).

⁴This typology is largely based on Ghazālī's (2011) monumental work *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.

Students were also required to reflect on how this aligned with their faith. These reflections became interesting classroom discussions.

Students were divided into groups, and each group was required to identify a social issue or problem within their community. They then had to present a project idea and, if approved, implement their project. The student projects are presented in Table 2. Data was gathered from student assignment submissions, presentations, reflections, and feedback. Feedback was also gathered from the course facilitator (an author) and panelists who attended the student project presentations.

A Description of the Projects

Table 2.

Group Names, Project Titles, and Project Descriptions

Group	Project title	Brief descriptions of the projects*
A	Female Upliftment—Sisterhood Project	The aim of this project was to create a safe place for discussion by developing a support group for female students to nurture their emotional, physical, and academic well-being and to create a positive atmosphere within the classroom. The intention was also to develop a sisterhood that could extend beyond the classroom.
B	<i>Madrasah</i> Stationery Drive	The aim of this project is to provide a <i>Madrasah</i> (Islamic education after-school program) and its students with <i>Yassarnal Quran</i> (Quran literacy books), part 1 and 2 books, as well as stationery packs for them to thrive in their learning of the Quran and academics. The mosque has <i>Madrasah</i> classes for children from an informal settlement. The <i>Madrasah</i> does not have enough books for the students, and the <i>Madrasah</i> students who are in primary school cannot afford the basic stationery requirements for school.
C	The Water Access Project	This project is about providing and educating the people in an informal settlement about clean water and how to acquire clean water.
D	Feeding Young Minds—School Feeding Project	We are raising funds that will go toward our feeding scheme project. We are feeding underprivileged school learners with the intention of making them feel loved and full of hope, as well as giving them nutrition for a better focus in school.
E	<i>Hijāb</i> Awareness Project—Modest Wear Awareness Campaign	The <i>hijāb</i> (the head covering for Muslim women), because of the hegemonic Western propaganda that disparages non-Western ways of life, is generally a topic for debate among young Muslim women, or, often, a discreetly avoided subject. To ensure that our target audience understood why Islam advocated the <i>hijāb</i> , we aimed to encourage, educate, and excite young girls who have come of age to embrace, defend, and understand the importance of their <i>hijāb</i> .
F	Project Green Fingers—Mosque Garden Project	This project aims to beautify and clean a local mosque and establish a garden space for the youth.

G	Menstrual Hygiene Management	Our project is Menstrual Hygiene Management for the underprivileged. We collect sanitary towels from the community we reside in and outside communities as well as accept donations of sanitary products, trying to eradicate period poverty.
H	Educating Youth—Tutoring Program for Youth Attending a Local Mosque	Islam places great emphasis on knowledge, learning, and helping those who are in need. Therefore, our group is focused on creating an initiative that will educate the youth of a low socioeconomic community. Many of these underprivileged students do not have a strong foundation in basic subjects due to inadequate resources, limited support structure, and a failing teaching system. The issue is that if one does not have a strong foundation, progressing and excelling become far more difficult, if not impossible. This is true for the students of this community who not only have been exposed to substance abuse but also lack a strong role model. Therefore, there is no doubt that improving their education will positively impact their quality of life. This initiative is solely focused on helping these underprivileged students strengthen their willingness to learn as well as providing an adequate support structure of mentors willing to help them navigate through the difficulties and challenges they face in their lives. Through this initiative, they will not only find purpose and inspiration but also see the value of giving back to their community and supporting those who follow them.

Note. *Project titles and descriptions were provided by the student groups and slightly edited by the authors. Any details in the descriptions that could result in the identification of communities or individuals were omitted.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the vast quantities of nonstandardized data collected, the data were broken up into analytical categories and coded and analyzed using thematic analysis and the theoretical framework outlined. The analysis approach was adopted from Etbaigha et al. (2022), where we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading through presentations, watching the recorded presentations, and sifting through the course feedback forms. We then identified themes based on the theoretical framework and categorized the data according to those themes. The data were reviewed and critiqued and then further categorized based on the 10 steps of Mezirow's transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

Trustworthiness

To show that the study was done rigorously, certain steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness. These steps include “triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, audit trail, reflexivity, and thick description,” which we have pursued (Taylor, 2013, p. 5). Thus, a third party verified the findings. The involvement of external panelists was included for peer scrutiny (Shenton, 2004). The analysis was sent to a colleague, and she was able to provide us with critical insights. We asked the participants (informants) to review the findings.

We also declare our positionality. The first author's positionality is influenced by her community, faith, and social context. The second author's worldview is influenced by a commitment to his Islamic faith while acknowledging the influence of the academy (as a colonial institution) on his positionality. He subscribes to the Islamic multiplexity paradigm (Senturk, 2023).

Findings

The findings were categorized according to the 10 steps of Mezirow's transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) and are discussed in the following sections:

1. A Disorienting Dilemma

Students were exposed to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN, 2022) and were taught how to use problem trees (cause-and-effect diagrams). They discussed the causes and effects of many global challenges such as poverty, unemployment, climate change, lack of access to education, and other issues. Students were told about the social and economic challenges faced by their broader community.

Students were then tasked to find a problem in their community that they were willing to address. Each group selected a different community and problem and soon grasped that there was a big gap between knowing about a problem as an outsider—at a distance from a group of people's lifeworld—and going out into the field and getting firsthand experience of an issue from their perspective.

Group A (Sisterhood project) identified that there was a lack of camaraderie and sisterhood among their peers at the institute and decided to address this. The disorienting dilemma they experienced was that their view of the lack of camaraderie was very naive, and they were then exposed to the complexities of female companionship and interactions. The exercise revealed deeper issues within the female institute's population, such as gossiping and the formation of cliques. The group felt that they were faced with active resistance when wanting to design activities to bring the females together. Some participants felt uncomfortable participating due to having to navigate the power dynamics. The group struggled to secure a venue and time slots to facilitate their activities. This left them feeling despondent and disheartened.

Group B (Stationery drive) initiated a stationery drive for young children attending an Islamic education after-school program. As the group gathered information, they discovered that, because of the informal circumstances these children were born into, they did not have identification documentation. The students were also not aware that the lack of formal identification is a barrier for children to access public schooling in South Africa. The fact that these children did not have identity documents raised a concern about the circumstances of their birth, as well as the situation in their households. The students had previously not been exposed to this type of family and social dynamics.

Group C (Water access project), after doing a preliminary analysis of the community, found that the community did not have access to clean water and decided to do a water purification project. They were optimistic about bringing clean, safe water into a community that did not have access to water. As the group then set about their plan to provide the water, they noticed the sheer amount of water used by individuals and families and found themselves overwhelmed when they calculated how much water would be required. On reflection on their personal circumstances, they realized how much clean water they use and have access to.

Group D (School feeding project) set out to treat children at a primary school to a special meal for a day. They chose a meal that they thought the children's families would not usually be able to afford—a burger meal and a soft drink. On becoming acquainted with the school, however, the students found that the children's basic needs were not met. The students did not know about the poverty of most of the students at the school and how great the income gap between them and the children at the school was until they engaged with the principal and teachers. This experience made them see their privilege of having access to nutritious meals. This was a big wake-up call for them, leaving them unsettled and slightly disheartened.

Group E (Modest wear awareness campaign) ran an Islamic modest wear awareness campaign with teenage girls. Being young adults themselves, they assumed they would be able to relate easily to these younger girls and predict their willingness and ability to participate in their events. After trying to arrange activities to encourage the girls, they realized that they had made many assumptions about these girls' interest in the topic, as well as the logistics that needed to be in place for the event to be a success. They were very disappointed when attendance at their events was very poor. They had many unrealistic expectations about how to access and influence teenage girls.

Group F (Mosque garden) chose to beautify a local mosque and create a youth space by starting a garden. They were challenged by the older mosque committee members, who were rigid and not very open to new ideas. An unexpected barrier was the disregard for cleanliness by the local community. They were

quite surprised that the mosque committee and the community did not welcome their initiative with enthusiasm. They were deflated and disappointed by the lack of interest from the community and the lack of support from the mosque committee.

Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) decided to do a menstrual hygiene campaign, collecting funds and donations for sanitary pads. They chose a school in an informal settlement that would be the primary beneficiary. After one visit to the school, they understood that the conditions and environment were enormously challenging and that the need for sanitary products was not isolated from the other challenges faced by the school learners. Being young women themselves, they were able to empathize with these girls and grasp the gravity of the situation.

Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) developed a tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque. After an initial interaction, they discovered that these youth have no aspirations due to a lack of exposure to positive role models. Discovering that the youth did not just need tutors but needed positive role models and mentors was a big revelation for the students. It challenged their assumptions about school and education and made them understand that the challenge was greater than simply the dissemination of knowledge.

2. Self-Examination with Feelings of Fear, Anger, Guilt, or Shame

As part of the process, students were asked to reflect on what they wanted to address and why they wanted to do it. They had to base their decisions on evidence from Islamic scripture. This reflective exercise facilitated them to see the scriptures as verses that can be implemented and engaged with, and not just read or theorized.

In their self-examination, Group A's project (Sisterhood project) aimed to challenge the status quo by encouraging relationships and connections within their class setting, which brought about fears of backlash, bullying, and marginalization from their peers. This was a completely unexpected outcome for Group A, as they assumed their classmates would welcome the intervention. This resulted in feelings of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty. Group B (Stationery drive) explained: “. . . it raised our awareness of their poverty situation. . .” (male). This group began to feel guilty about their privileged upbringing. They also felt embarrassed that they knew so little about the suffering of the children in the area.

Group C (Water access project) went on a site visit. When they saw the gravity of the situation and the impact of the lack of access to water, they felt overwhelmed and angry. They realized that it was not just a lack of drinking water but also a lack of sanitation and hygiene practices. Similarly, Group D (School feeding project) mentioned feeling ashamed at how easily they could access food, while these young children leave home without breakfast every day.

Group F (Mosque garden) felt angered by the state of the mosque. They arranged a day to clean up the proposed area for the garden. They explained that while they knew there was litter and dirt, they were not expecting the extent and type of filth they encountered. Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) had to grapple with the understanding of their privileged upbringing and how this impacted their schooling. Their eyes had been opened to all the opportunities they were able to pursue simply because they were exposed to successful, ambitious, and accomplished people.

The abovementioned issues show that there were internal ruminations that show the to-and-fro of the *nafs* (hedonistic self) and the *'aql* (reason) as proposed within the multiplexity paradigm. The *nafs* gravitates toward ease, comfort, and submitting to base desires, whereas the *'aql* provides reason and rational understanding, striving for improvement and betterment. This experience of having to negotiate the tussle between the *nafs* and *'aql* would not have taken place had they not embarked on the SL journey. Importantly, the multiplexity paradigm also suggests that service to humanity is one of the ways through which the *nafs* is refined.

3. A Critical Assessment of Assumptions

Group A (Sisterhood project) assumed all the girls in their class would agree that their project was important and that fostering a sisterhood would be mutually beneficial to all. After initial engagement with their fellow

students, they found that this was not the case. Not only did some of their classmates fail to see its importance, but it also became apparent that classmates' definitions of sisterhood and what should be prioritized were not the same as what they aspired to.

Group B (Stationery drive) assumed they knew what stationery items would be required by the children attending the school. On visiting the school and interacting with the principal, they came to understand that their perception and the reality on the ground were not aligned. They needed to adjust their action plan to meet the needs of the learners.

Group D (School feeding project) assumed that the school feeding scheme was providing something to eat for the children. They were noticeably distressed when they discovered that sandwiches were often discarded by hungry children. The idea that a supposedly hungry child would not eat the sandwich was something they struggled to grasp. It was only upon further examination that they understood the dilemma: the bread was filled with peanut butter. With no jam or syrup, the young children struggled to swallow the dry bread, resulting in food wastage.

Group E (Modest wear awareness campaign) assumed that all the girls they were working with would be excited to join the modest wear journey. Though the girls initially showed interest, they did not respond as warmly as the group had hoped. The group had to change their approach and began to understand that the journey to spiritual self-awareness, as it relates to modest wear, is not a "one size fits all."

Group F (Mosque garden) assumed that the mosque they had approached would be eager for them to be involved. After speaking to mosque committee members, they discovered that this was not the case. In addition, they also assumed that the mosque perimeter and grounds, though neglected, would be reasonably clean. They were immensely disappointed when they discovered human feces on the grounds.

Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) was exposed to the harsh environment that young ladies living in different communities are faced with. This led to feelings of guilt when contemplating their privilege and feelings of despair about the condition of women in disadvantaged communities. They also felt unsafe in some areas where they distributed the sanitary towels. This led to further feelings of shame because they realized that they could choose not to enter those areas where they felt unsafe, but many young girls are born into these communities with nowhere else to turn to.

Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) set out with the purpose of assisting learners with homework so that they could get better grades on assessments. After initial interactions, they found that the need was greater than just academic support. These learners needed emotional support and the influence of positive role models to motivate them to work toward academic success. This group of students was not overwhelmed by the challenge of their assumptions. Instead, it excited and motivated them to change their plan and better support the youth.

4. Recognition That One's Discontent and the Process of Transformation Are Shared

Through class discussions facilitated by the module leader (the first author), the students were exposed to each other's perspectives and ideas on the challenges faced. Through this process, they found that their discontent was shared and that their peers also had to question their assumptions. This discussion acted as a positive feedback loop, as more students shared their ideas, inspiration, and positive attitude toward solving the problems and even were excited to address the challenges. Thus, students discussed their discontent with their peers and realized that these were shared feelings. After the initial discomfort, they felt that they could, together, do something to make a change.

A student from Group A (Sisterhood project) shared: "Change starts with us" (female). A student from Group D (School feeding project) added: "It made us more aware of how much we need to go out and help other people" (female). This clearly shows their recognition of both their discontent and their role in changing the situation.

5. Exploration of Options for New Roles, Relationships, and Actions

Students had to take on new roles within their groups and community as they discovered new information and their assumptions were shattered. A member of Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) shares: "Going

to these areas and interacting with these young women on such a personal level was very heartwarming” (female). Students found themselves dealing with intergroup tension and had to find ways to mitigate it. Group A (Sisterhood project) started with a flat structure in terms of their project roles, and after initial efforts at scheduling, seemingly going around in circles, they came to the conclusion that they needed one central person to lead the group to be successful in the scheduling of their interventions. Group E (Modest wear awareness campaign) had initially tried to befriend their participants. This resulted in them not getting the required dedication and commitment from their participants. They needed to conduct themselves in a more professional manner and handle the intervention with greater formality to attain the desired commitment from the participants.

6. Planning a Course of Action

All groups were required to share their findings and present a project plan to tackle the issues or challenges they encountered. Each group presented their project to their class as well as three to four external panelists. Table 2 provides details. For example, Group A (Sisterhood project) planned social sessions for their peers and had to first consult with the institution management to see if this could be accommodated and to secure a venue. Group F (Mosque garden) arranged a meeting with the mosque board to get permission for their project, allocate the area for their garden, and discuss the way they would be working with each other.

Peer feedback and questions were encouraged in these sessions. External panelists from various sectors also gave the students a perspective on the project plans. The slide deck for project proposals was evaluated by the course convener, and feedback was given to each group individually. Groups could also schedule consultations with the course convener.

7. Acquiring Knowledge and Skills for Implementing One's Plans

Groups were supported throughout the implementation of their plans. They were given access to experienced community workers and project managers who helped them through the process.

Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) shared their experience of the community they were engaging with:

The response from students and parents was overwhelmingly positive. Each time a tutoring session was held, a significant group of students would show up. Students often showed renewed excitement for their work due to the tutors making a special effort to reveal the benefit of the subjects before beginning work on the subject itself. The school children also indicated that their understanding of the topics had improved and that they had been able to see an improvement in their marks as well as feel more confident in class overall. The experience was incredibly heartwarming and reveals that students from all walks of life can succeed in the classroom when sufficient resources are made available.

This group used this feedback to further enhance their project and intervention.

Group D (School feeding project), who had planned to arrange a meal for underprivileged children at a local primary school, soon realized they needed to develop their fundraising and campaigning skills to make their project a reality. This group looked at different ways to raise the necessary money to meet their targets. They also developed communication skills, as they needed to consult with the principal and teachers at the school to make these arrangements.

Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) had an interesting experience. Their project was so well received by their community that the response was overwhelming. They ended up receiving a donation of over 10,000 female hygiene products, far beyond their target. This group needed to adjust their plan to accommodate these extra items and ensure they were distributed to the women who needed them.

8. Provisionally Trying New Roles

Many of the students reported that their projects challenged them to step out of their comfort zones and take ownership and leadership. Two of the community leaders who served as panelists for their presentations advised: “Beautiful initiative, try to get ‘in touch’ with the kids and serve as role models to them” (Panelist to Group B—Stationery drive) and “identify some potential role models to your session that can further uplift your group” (Panelist to Group A—Sisterhood project).

The youth in Group B (Stationery drive) had initially thought they would simply do a stationery drive and drop off the hampers. When they contacted the head of the school, however, they were invited to come and see the school and meet the teachers and learners. This shifted how the youth viewed their project, driving them to do more.

In Group D (School feeding project), because their fundraising target was R10,000 (ZAR), all the group members had to take leadership roles in securing those necessary funds within the time frame. These young women had to step out of their comfort zones and become public speakers, salesladies, and ambassadors for their project.

The young women in Group A (Sisterhood project) had initially thought they would have guests come in and facilitate their sessions. After deep deliberations, it became clear that the best people to relate to their peers were themselves. They, thus, became the facilitators and organizers of their sessions.

9. Building Competence and Self-Confidence in New Roles and Relationships

One of the students in Group D (School feeding project) reflected: “As we reflect back . . . if there was (a) thing that stood out most. . . it was a real eye-opener. . . the reactions (of the children) motivated and inspired us to do more.” This group experienced firsthand the beauty of selfless service and the positive feedback loop of doing acts of kindness. The principal of the beneficiary school commented: “Our learners come from very poor backgrounds, and this meant the world to them.” This inspired these female students to redouble their efforts and gave them the confidence that they could make a difference in the world.

Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) built relationships with community nonprofit organizations and, through those new connections, reached a level of success far beyond their expectations: “We started off with a few packets of sanitary towels in our collection, those few packets turned into more. We helped more young women than we initially intended to.”

10. A Reintegration into One’s Life on the Basis of Conditions Dictated by One’s New Perspective

A female student from Group D (School feeding project) shared: “Our experience was surreal; we felt the work and effort we put in . . . it paid off when we saw the kids’ reactions.” From this, we can see the positive impact that the project had on the group members as well. They felt motivated, excited, and inspired to continue doing good.

A female student from Group G (Menstrual hygiene campaign) shared a similar sentiment: “This has been an incredibly rewarding experience, and for me, it was more than a project” with a second student from the same group adding: “Working on this project has been incredibly rewarding. We often forget how blessed we are, yet we take stuff for granted.” This shows that they reflected on their project and its impact, as well as their role.

A male student in Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) explained: “This project can have a long-term impact on the young souls you are working with.” He acknowledged and began to understand that the seemingly small project can have lasting effects.

A female student in Group D (School feeding project) added: “The lessons we learnt from this project were that everyone is living their own and different life, and we should always take time out of our privileged lives for the less fortunate.”

When reflecting on the statements by these students, it is clear that the effects of the projects impacted them beyond the scope of these projects.

Discussion

SL is advocated as a means to develop students' capacity to apply what they have learned to the real world. In this case study, we see that the religious studies students' engagement with SL moved them to understand the dynamic interplay between knowledge as theory and the lifeworld of human beings. Knowing a principle is not the same as knowing how to contextualize this principle. For example, Islamic scripture advocates the wearing of *hijāb* as a sign of modesty, but when students in Group E went out to encourage peers, they found that the young people they engaged with did not necessarily share their priorities. They had made many assumptions about their communities. This is a recurring finding; students made many assumptions about the communities they intended to serve before engagement, which they had to revise after engagement. Another recurring theme was that students found that their initial aims were almost always superseded by what they discovered within the communities. These two findings, although not novel, do speak to the gap between students at the institute and the material realities on the ground in Cape Town. From an income distribution perspective, South Africa has the highest Gini⁵ coefficient in the world (Valodia, 2023), and since the students at the institute were not at the poverty level (most of them came from middle-income backgrounds), they were visibly shocked by the circumstances of the communities they engaged with. The two findings also show the need for students of theology to engage with communities while studying so that they can start to think about how scripture can be brought to life within the context of real-world challenges, and so that they can come to know the communities that they will be serving.

Particularly for faith-based institutions, where the aim is for the student to become a conscious citizen as a believer in a faith, studies cannot remain in the realm of general rules and principles. SL is a key stepping stone for developing students who can transfer their scriptural knowledge into the lifeworlds of their fellow citizens and communities. In particular, the Islamic faith encourages transformative learning as backed by the Prophetic narration: "Whosoever of you sees an evil⁶, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith" (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Book 1, Ḥadīth 84).

Students were forced out of their lifeworlds, into situations and environments that were unfamiliar to them, that is, the lifeworlds of fellow citizens that were characterized by different social and economic challenges. This stark contrast to their daily lifeworld experience not only was a catalyst for their deeper understanding of the challenges faced by people in struggling communities but also developed their empathy and agency. The article argues that this empathetic response can be explained by the Islamic concept of *Futuwwah*. Students' self-reported responses indicated that the SL module presented them with transformative instances. These transformational moments, the article argues, have an influence that we would term *Futuwwah*. We have chosen the term *Futuwwah* as opposed to terms suggested by Bringle and Clayton (2021, p. 1), such as "social responsibility, knowledge and skills for democracy, values clarification, moral development, public good, citizenship, democratic competencies, sense of solidarity, ubuntu, commitment to and capacities to advance social justice, civic identity, cosmopolitan citizenship, life purpose, and global citizenship" because it captures the spirit of an Islamic epistemological frame. From the myriad contexts that the students encountered, it would seem that coming face to face with the reality of the challenges that people face served as an opportunity for students to develop prosocial behaviors that can also be termed *embodied Futuwwah ethics and conduct*. The article argues that educators in faith contexts need to present students with SL opportunities to interact with people from different cultural and socioeconomic lifeworlds, as well as engagements that will allow them to build relationships of trust with them.

⁵A high Gini coefficient reflects a large gap between a country's richest and poorest citizens. South Africa has the world's highest Gini coefficient (Valodia, 2023) when last measured in 2014.

⁶The word *evil* is used in this translation, but the original Arabic word *munkar* can also be translated as detestable and reprehensible, which the authors aver is more appropriate for capturing the intent of the narration.

The motivation behind teaching young people the principles of *Futuwwah* was to activate their potential and develop good human beings—as individuals and as active, compassionate participants within their communities (Aščerić-Todd, 2007). With the *nafs* (hedonistic self) naturally inclined toward self-prioritization, *Futuwwah* ethics pushes the self (*nafs*) to selfless service and compassion. *Futuwwah* is thus both a means of refining the soul and the outcome of the refinement of the soul, an iterative process.

Futuwwah is derived from the Arabic word for young males—*fatā*. Despite this, Senturk (2021) explains that *Futuwwah* is relevant to all age-groups, people from all walks of life, and males and females. *Futuwwah*, according to Senturk (2021), incorporates three principles of Quranic ethics: reciprocal ethics (which governs interactions between individuals and other individuals as well as individuals and society); tolerant ethics (which focuses on patience, endurance, forbearance, pardoning, and reconciliation); and altruistic ethics (which includes prioritization of the needs of others, responding to evil with good, and kindness and generosity). Traditionally, *Futuwwah* also refers to the ability and tenacity to get up and do something, step up, come forward, and effect change. There is a strong link between *Futuwwah*, empathy, and agency.

Despite being aware that the module was an elective one and that their performance in this module would not impact their academic transcripts, many students embraced their projects fully, volunteering beyond the baseline requirements. This extra effort or voluntary exertion to do good is an aspect of *Futuwwah* conduct. The projects or interventions they implemented served as an altruistic service to the recipient communities, with no compensation and little recognition for the students.

The authors argue that students cultivated *Futuwwah* ethics in doing their projects. Group H (Tutoring program for youth attending a local mosque) showed this by going beyond the scope of their project to inspire and motivate the young boys not only to do well in school but also to dream big. Group A (Sisterhood project) prioritized the overall class environment over their personal preferences and, in doing so, practiced *Futuwwah*. Students demonstrated early steps in their cultivation of *Futuwwah* in their acts of service and kindness.

We noticed that the motivation for acts of service and kindness could be either or both:

- the innate desire to do good and be a good person, which is linked to agency
- the desire to care for or be good to others, which is linked to empathy

The ultimate practice and manifestation of *Futuwwah* is that both these reasons, separately and collectively, were grounded in the desire to please and be obedient to God. This desire to please God is often associated with the refinement of the desires of the hedonistic self (*nafs*).

The desire to do good could result in actions that have negative consequences, especially when there is no empathy or care involved in the action—even though the intention was noble. Similarly, a caring nature could be passive, without any action or active engagement. Passively caring about something will not result in any action or change. Thus, the relationship between action (agency) and care (empathy) is linked to one another. These two, together, form the basis of *Futuwwah* when grounded in the desire to please God.

In addition to this, we noted that for some young students, the actions were initially carried out simply to complete the task at hand, without a formulated or clear intention grounded in the pleasure of God. However, while immersed in their SL and upon reflection, they recognized that these actions are ones that are pleasing to God. This moment of awareness, recognition, and reflection provided them with an opportunity to recalibrate their intention. It also made students understand that acts of kindness and acts of service to the community can be transformed into acts of devotion to God with good intentions, and exposed them to firsthand experience that selfless service for the betterment of others and the pleasure of God is a means of refining the self (*nafs*).

Both *Futuwwah* grounded in God's obedience and seeking his pleasure and *Futuwwah* as an action that results in the awareness of intentionally doing good to attain God's pleasure are represented in Figure 2.

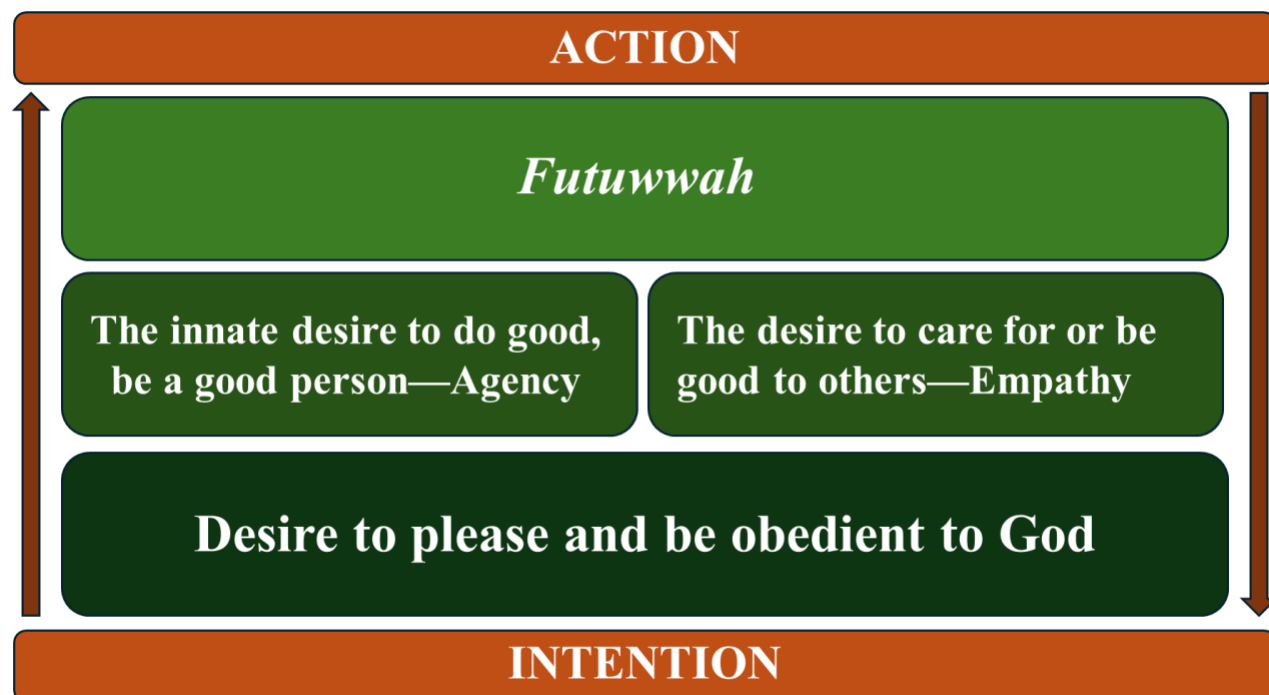


Figure 2.

The Motivation for the Manifestation of Futuwwah Is Grounded in the Desire to Please God, and Practicing Futuwwah Can Strengthen One's Agency and Empathy, Both Grounded in Attaining God's Pleasure

A heartwarming observation in the students was that their innate propensity to want to do good (agency) and behave altruistically (empathy) came to the surface. Despite their personal challenges and unexpected stumbling blocks, the majority of them wanted to positively contribute to the betterment of their community. While some students formed their intention from the beginning, others gained this awareness at a later stage. The SL opportunity allowed students to be immersed in real community challenges, developing both agency and empathy in the process. The manifestation of *Futuwwah* was apparent at different stages, at both group level and individual student level, further endorsing the value of immersive, curated SL opportunities over classroom instruction and even ad hoc volunteering.

A key insight we derived was that the students' existing repertoire of communicative skills was insufficient, and they needed to reflectively look for new modes of communication and understand their target community. AR, particularly community-based AR, is premised on interactive activities, and so it is a deliberate process through which people aim through dialogue to transform their understanding through cycles of action and reflection, as shown in Figure 1.

When mapping Mezirow's transformative learning process steps onto the AR cycle steps taken by the students, the transformative learning instances can be highlighted in the students' projects. When analyzing the findings, specifically during Mezirow's transformative learning process steps 5–10 (which occurred during AR cycle steps 2–5), where students engaged in communicative action, the article argues that the immersive community-based SL developed *Futuwwah* characteristics within the students. Similarly, Steinberg et al. (2011) have identified and defined the "civic-minded graduate" (CMG) as a university graduate who develops an interest in and ability to collaborate with others in working toward a common good.

In terms of published literature on SL and its effects on student outcomes, there is not much available on SL, specifically in Islamic educational institutes within South Africa. This article has tried to fill this gap in the literature. Particularly, for Muslim students, SL, as argued in this article, has been shown to lead to the path of *Futuwwah*. We strongly encourage Islamic educational institutions to consider adding SL as a compulsory graded module to their academic programs. There is a lot that can be done to curate these experiences, to address both local societal challenges, and to move the theoretical scriptural curriculum content to the lifeworlds of citizens and adherents.

Conclusion

Key findings through engaging in SL were that students learned about their communities and also noted their ignorance of the nature of their communities' challenges. Students also learned about the gap between religious prescripts and the reality of adherents that can be different from their theological perspectives. Overall, this experience led them, as the authors have argued, to raise their levels of *Futuwwah*.

Curating an SL experience for students can ensure they are exposed to societal dilemmas in a safe and supportive learning environment. This can lead to transformational learning, and specifically for Muslim students, it can lead to *Futuwwah*, a term that captures civic-mindedness within the multiplexity Islamic paradigm. The findings show that community-based experiential SL can be a catalyst for personal transformation, agency, empathy, and the development of *Futuwwah* in Muslim students. The SL engagement pushed students to engage in internal deliberations through their exposure to disorienting dilemmas that can also be described by the multiplexity paradigm's description as the internal tussle between the *nafs* (hedonistic self) and *'aql* (reason).

The article recommends that SL be incorporated as core to learning rather than being peripheral to learning, with particular emphasis on Muslim institutions operating in a context where they are a religious minority. Thus, the article suggests that SL modules should be credit-bearing compulsory modules (as opposed to being elective modules). The AR-based SL model discussed in this article can be adapted for different age groups as well as faith groups. This will go a long way to ensure that SL has a transformative agenda—with the module/course being designed to ensure that the students are engaged in specific types of learning activities. The article also addressed a gap in the academic literature by looking at SL within Muslim educational institutes and found that SL can enhance student outcomes, especially the cultivation of *Futuwwah*.

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