# Intersecting Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation: Insights from College Students at Hekima House

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| | This qualitative study delves into the intersecting themes of Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation within the unique context of Hekima House. Five college students embarked on a Service-Learning course leading to a transformative self-discovery journey and societal impact. Through in-depth analysis, this research illuminates the profound effects of Service-Learning on individuals and the communities they serve. The students' immersion into Hekima House's resilient community highlights the power of Service-Learning to shape empathetic, socially responsible citizens who actively engage with complex global challenges. The implications of this study extend beyond academia, challenging higher education institutions to foster global citizens who are culturally conscious, empathetic, and initiative taking in addressing complex global challenges. By bridging the gap between academic knowledge and societal impact, this research encourages a paradigm shift in higher education, preparing students to navigate an ever-changing world and make a tangible impact on society. |

## Introduction

Service-Learning is a high-impact pedagogical practice in higher education, extending beyond traditional classroom instruction. It gives students unique opportunities to engage in meaningful activities, develop new skills, and reflect on their experiences. McDougle and Li's (2023) groundbreaking sheds light on the transformative power of Service-Learning in shaping students' identities. Their study emphasizes the significance of Service-Learning experiences in fostering prosocial identities.

An integral aspect of Service-Learning is the practice of reflection. Students engage in reflective processes to better understand course content, the subject matter, and its connection to the societal context (Kolb, 1984; Furco, 1984; Lynch, 2017). This reflective component is considered a fundamental pedagogical element of Service-Learning (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Gibson et al., 2011; Damons and Dunbar-Krige, 2020). Within the space of Service-Learning, reflection plays a pivotal role. It is an intrinsic and fundamental practice that empowers students to delve deeper into their academic coursework, comprehend the subject in its broader societal context, and cultivate a more profound understanding. Reflection is considered a cornerstone of Pedagogy in Service-Learning (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997; Lynch, 2017). At the heart of this process lies Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory,

which underscores the profound importance of reflection within the experiential learning journey. According to Kolb's theory, reflection is a conceptual framework that equips students with the means to derive valuable insights from their service experiences (Kolb, 1984). This dual interplay between reflection and experiential learning sets the foundation for our study to explore the multifaceted impacts of Service-Learning on the community and the participating students (Yorio et al., 2012; Bartels, 2022).

Higher education has long been recognized as a cornerstone of personal growth and intellectual development (Ashman & Gillies, 2003). It equips individuals with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to explore the complex issues of our time. Beyond academics, higher education is vital in nurturing well-rounded, academically proficient, socially, and culturally conscious individuals (Osmani et al., 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2008). Building on McDougle and Li's (2023) work, the broader academic landscape has consistently illuminated the multifaceted impact of Service-Learning. This pedagogical practice extends beyond traditional classroom instruction, offering students distinctive opportunities for skill development and reflection. McDougle and Li's (2023) findings provide a significant foundation for understanding how Service-Learning experiences can mold students' identities. This concept aligns with prior research highlighting the formation of various identities through this educational approach.

Over the years, research has consistently highlighted positive outcomes (Truong et al., 2023; Walker & Johnson, 2022; Moely & Ilustre, 2014; and Warren, 2012) associated with Service-Learning. For instance, studies have shown that participation in Service-Learning can form various identities (Walker & Johnson, 2022), encompassing self-identity, ethnic identity, civic and political identity, professional identity, academic identity, and even religious identity. A meta-analysis of 11 studies by Warren (2012) reveals that Service-Learning learning effectively increases student learning, including self-reports and independent measures such as course examinations or assignments. This insight is deeply rooted in the work of McDougle and Li (2023), who have shown that Service-Learning offers academic enrichment and plays a pivotal role in developing prosocial identities among students. The profound impact of Service-Learning on identity formation has been a subject of interest in the academic community.

Literature (Winans-Solis, 2014; McDougles & Li, 2023) documented the transformative power of Service-Learning experiences, illustrating how engagement in these activities can influence students' sense of self and their connections to various social, cultural, and professional spheres. In addition, McDougle and Li's (2023) work underscores that Service-Learning catalyzes the development of prosocial identities, nurturing a sense of empathy, social responsibility, and a commitment to contributing positively to society. Reflective practice in Service-Learning is integral, fostering students' progression toward transformative cognitive processes. This facet encourages students to engage in introspection, contemplating areas for self-enhancement and the potential contributions they can offer to change-making (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

**The Origin and Value of Service-Learning**

The concept of 'service-learning' is multifaceted in its definitions and the names it goes by. A literature review

reveals that Service-Learning can also be referred to as academic Service-Learning, civic engagement, school-based Service-Learning, course-based Service-Learning, academically based community service, scholarly service, community-engaged learning, and community Service-Learning. These diverse terms capture the essence of a concept that integrates education with community service and underscores its varied dimensions. Service-Learning infuses the traditional academic experience with tangible, firsthand engagement, equipping students with a holistic understanding of the subject matter and fostering the development of critical thinking, empathy, and social responsibility. Its value extends far beyond the classroom, nurturing students who are knowledgeable and driven by a profound commitment to enact positive change in the world. This approach is pivotal in shaping individuals who bridge the gap between academic knowledge and societal impact.

## Hekima House: A Sanctuary for Salvation from FGM

Nestled within this narrative is Hekima House, a sanctuary for girls aged 12-17 who have escaped the haunting experience and threat of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This deeply rooted cultural practice persists in parts of East Africa. Hekima, as a refuge, provides safety and educational opportunities, offering Salvation from the shadows of FGM and a chance for the girls to dream of brighter futures. Hekima House is driven by two interrelated imperatives: removing social exclusion, using a recovery-oriented approach, and eliminating stigmatization resulting from this antiquated traditional practice. Some of the 18 girls under the care of Hekima House have undergone FGM and had to escape the possibility of being given away for early marriage. For these girls, Hekima House is a shelter and a sanctuary where they find solace from FGM's physical and emotional scars. Here, they embark on a journey of healing and empowerment, fostering resilience and shaping their identities beyond the constraints of harmful traditions. It demonstrates how promoting critical reflection on social norms, thoughts, and actions within communities (Johansen et al., 2013) can create a sanctuary for at-risk girls and contribute to positive change in cultural practices.

### The Convergence of Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation

The core of this study resides in the unique intersection of Service-Learning, the pursuit of Salvation, and the profound journey of personal transformation. It is within this convergence that the heart of our exploration lies. This multifaceted nexus illuminates the intricate dance of interconnected elements and the intricate web of relationships that define empowerment-focused Service-Learning (EFSL) at Hekima House. At its core, this study delves into the symbiotic relationship between college students and the girls at Hekima House. College students, driven by a desire to impart knowledge, understanding, and empathy, embark on a transformative journey. They seek to offer their expertise and support to the girls, who, in turn, aspire to create a haven for themselves and grasp the opportunity for a better life. Within the walls of Hekima House, where the echoes of FGM still reverberate, these two groups intersect. In this intersection, the college students and the girls engage in a reciprocal exchange of experiences and growth.

The profound significance of this convergence extends beyond the traditional boundaries of academic inquiry. It offers a paradigm that transcends the confines of textbooks and classrooms, encapsulating the essence of human

connection, compassion, and empowerment. Here, we find insights that reach the heart of human experience, exploring themes of resilience, empathy, and the potential for positive change. This intersection is a testament to the transformative power of education, service, and the quest for Salvation, where the boundaries of conventional knowledge dissolve, giving rise to a richer, more profound understanding of human nature and our capacity for change. The convergence of Service-Learning, Salvation, and personal transformation at Hekima House is a microcosm of the transformative potential inherent in the human spirit. It is a journey of hope and resilience, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to create a tapestry of shared experiences, growth, and empowerment. This convergence represents the heart of this study and the heart of a larger narrative that transcends the academic realm and touches the essence of our collective humanity.

**The Convergence of Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation**

Students' perspectives are altered through local Service-Learning, as demonstrated by the transformative learning theory presented in this study. It shows that the challenges students face in challenging stereotypes, personal beliefs, and preconceived notions in domestic environments (in this case, the USA) are like the challenges they face in international Service-Learning programs. To effectively do that, we constructed an Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) model that centers on three key factors: EFSL, the college students involved in this program, and the Hekima House community. Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) is a community-based approach to Service-Learning that surpasses traditional teaching methods by building resilience, engaging participants in educational and civic engagement, and creating transformative experiences. EFSL strives to empower students by equipping them with the necessary skills and mindset, enabling them to confront challenging societal issues and become active members. Students are motivated to actively participate in communities, comprehend different viewpoints, and contribute to society. Those who do so also gain valuable skills that can be applied effectively within groups. The focus of EFSL is practical training, where students work on service projects to understand complex issues better. By incorporating reflection practices into the model, participants experience greater self-efficacy, critical thinking, and a sense of social responsibility.

1. *Empowerment:* EFSL catalyzes empowerment, nurturing personal growth, resilience, and self-efficacy among college students and the girls of Hekima House.
2. *Resilience:* The concept of resilience is a critical outcome, representing the capacity of individuals to overcome adversity, thrive, and contribute to their empowerment.
3. *Transformative Impact:* EFSL brings about positive changes that resonate with college students and the Hekima House community, encompassing personal and academic growth, a sense of civic responsibility, and community improvement.

**Relationships within the Framework**

The relationships within this framework serve as the structural threads that weave together the critical elements of Empowerment Focused Service-Learning (EFSL). They illuminate the intricate web of connections that bind the various components, emphasizing the interplay of elements and the profound implications that arise from their interactions. Recognizing reciprocity is a crucial aspect of these relationships, which are grounded in the principles

established by EFSL. It demonstrates the ongoing knowledge, experiences, and growth exchange between college students and the girls at Hekima House. This reciprocal learning process benefits college students as they learn new things and transform their lives. The reciprocal dynamics highlights the encompassing nature of EFSL, where the transformative potential is not restricted to a particular group.

A second key feature of these relationships is the focus on the community. It emphasizes the fusion of educational objectives with community engagement, recognizing that EFSL is not a one-way endeavor but a collaborative partnership. At Hekima House, college students and girls contribute to their community by building a sense of collective responsibility. This community-based approach fosters a greater sense of connection and belonging, encourages empathy, and is committed to making positive changes. Furthermore, these associations are not limited to the individual in question and affect the wider community. EFSL's impact ripples outward, influencing the college students and the girls at Hekima House and the community in which they are embedded. This broad effect demonstrates that EFSL is an essential model for positive changes within the program and the world.

*Purpose of the Study*

This study aims to explore the transformative potential of Service-Learning within the context of a Service-Learning course, shedding light on its profound impact on college students and the communities they engage with. By examining the experiences of five college students, this study highlights the importance of Service-Learning as a means of producing more compassionate and socially engaged individuals. This study extends its implications beyond academia, advocating for a paradigm shift in higher education to cultivate globally conscious citizens who actively address the world's complex challenges. The twofold aim is exhibited in this qualitative study:

1. To evaluate the influence of Service-Learning, particularly the EFSL model, on the Hekima House community and college-bound students. This involves comprehending how Service-Learning can empower the community and have a reciprocal impact on college students. Understanding how Service-Learning can empower the community and impact college students is crucial.

2. To explore Service-Learning's lasting effects and transformative potential on college students, extending beyond their immediate academic experiences. The study explores how Service-Learning can foster the development of diverse identities and encourage students to make lasting social contributions.

*Research Question*

The inquiry at the core of our research focuses on the transformative potential of Empowerment Focused Service-Learning (EFSL). The aim is to clarify how the community-oriented philosophy of EFSL empowers the Hekima House population and what reciprocal effects occur among college students involved in this educational approach. This examination and methodology expose this educational system's intricate mechanics and interdependent connections. A central question drives our research:

> How does the community-centered approach of Empowerment Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) contribute to the empowerment of the Hekima House community, and what are the reciprocal effects on college students?

## Methodology

This study explored the strategic implications of the Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) paradigm through the community-centered approach, as directed by its central research question. In that regard, this study probes deeper into the details of this strategy to learn how it has been instrumental in helping the Hekima House community thrive and forging a mutually beneficial change that shapes the experiences and growth of college students. To gain a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of EFSL and its impact on creating compassionate, socially conscious individuals worldwide, we will examine various empowerment mechanisms and intricate interactions between the community and the students. Through qualitative case study techniques, this research explored the rich experiences and perspectives that college students engaged in Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) at Hekima House can offer. A qualitative case study approach was selected as it allows for a more detailed exploration of the complex dynamics and unique insights within EFSL. This method aligns with the study's aims to understand how EFSL affects college students and the communities they live and work in at Hekima House. The qualitative case study approach determined that all aspects of their understanding of EFSL were due to empirical evidence and firsthand experiences. This method obtained a comprehensive set of contextualized data that accurately depicted the specifics of the EFSL experience as experienced by the participants. EFSL's impact on individuals was evident in their personal, civic, moral, and intellectual development.

Moreover, using the qualitative focus group interview approach, it was also considered that Service-Learning experiences can be highly contextualized, which is unique to Hekima House. This approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the specific factors and mechanisms that make EFSL at Hekima House esoteric and innovative in the broader context of community-based learning. By emphasizing the experiences of college students, this approach added depth and variety to the study's findings, making it easier to understand the challenges that EFSL faced at this Hekima Home.

### Data Collection Methods and Analysis

A phenomenological model often suggested for comprehending the nature of lived experience in philosophical texts has been a fundamental principle in examining human consciousness. Subgenres of the phenomenological school, established by prominent philosophers Husserl (1859–1938) and Heidegger (1889–1976), emerged, each reflecting a unique set of philosophical perspectives. The scholars were united by the shared conviction that lived experience was a fundamental aspect of human existence. Despite having a common foundational belief, both subgroups had differing viewpoints on certain critical aspects of their behavior. As Husserl (1975) described, bracketing temporarily dispenses preconceived ideas and judgments and explores essences to comprehend the theoretical and philosophical aspects of human experience. These methodological elements heavily influenced his approach to phenomenology.

As a qualitative study, the phenomenological model heavily influenced our method of understanding the students' experiences at Hekima House and gathering data through targeted focus group interviews, which corresponded

with Husserl's use of bracketing and essence exploration. These methodological elements heavily influenced his approach to phenomenology. We compared Husserl's bracketing commitment by using this phenomenological perspective in our analysis of students' experiences at Hekima House and our data collection. We took a risk by not dwelling on preconceived notions and instead engaged with the rich, unfiltered stories of the students. By doing so, we could gain a fresh and authentic perspective on their lives. Like Husserl's exploration of essence was committed to finding the root structures of human experience, our data collection efforts and analysis were dedicated to discovering the essential characteristics and structures that determined the students' journey at Hekima House. The revelation enabled us to expose the profound experiences of their time at this one-of-a-kind institution.

Furthermore, the investigation encompassed an elaborate method of information gathering by using semi-structured interviews with college students and staff involved in EFSL at Hekima House. The participants in the research were provided with a rundown of the types of data that would be collected and assurances that any contributions would remain anonymous. During these interviews, participants were allowed to share their experiences and perspectives, leading to unrestricted answers that showcased the complexity and subtlety of their Service-Learning journey. Also, without deviating from the phenomenological approach, the study conducted a thematic investigation to identify common and unique student experiences in the data, which revealed recurring themes and patterns. A thorough and methodical study of the gathered data took around one and a half to two months. Narrative analysis was utilized in the study, which examined the extensive narratives of college students and Hekima House administrators who answered interview questions. Data was given false names upon conception, which aided in understanding and categorizing. However, data could be used without explicit consent. The constant comparison method was utilized to identify patterns, traits, and angles in the data, facilitating the dissection of concepts in reflections.

**Ethical Considerations**

The importance of ethical integrity cannot be overstated in this study; every necessary precaution was taken to safeguard the rights and health of participants. Every student and Hekima House staff member who was interviewed gave informed consent, ensuring they were fully informed about the study process, their participation, and their rights as participants. Also, this study emphasized maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants (used pseudonyms). The students' privacy will be protected by ensuring that any identifiable information is kept confidential, and their responses will also be communicated in a manner that ensures their anonymity. These ethical safeguards ensure that participants feel safe and respectful while confident in their research.

information is kept confidential, and their responses will also be communicated in a manner that ensures their anonymity. These ethical safeguards ensure that participants feel safe and respectful while confident in their research.

## Literature Review

This literature review embarks on a journey through the multifaceted landscape of Service-Learning, seeking to understand how it catalyzes empowerment and personal transformation. Empowerment Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) is at the heart of this exploration. This unique community-centered model has shown remarkable potential in fostering participants' resilience, self-efficacy, and civic responsibility. The review delves into the core principles, theories, and modalities of Service-Learning, culminating in examining the voices and narratives of the students and communities it impacts. As we traverse this terrain, we will draw from the collective wisdom of the Service-Learning community, exploring seminal works, foundational theories, and exemplary studies. Through this review, we hope to understand the transformative power of Service-Learning, pave the way for future research, and inspire a dialogue on the intersections of empowerment and education. In doing so, we invite you to embark on this intellectual journey, where Service-Learning is more than a pedagogical method; it is a vehicle for Salvation and transformation.

In his work "Studying Service-Learning," Furco (2014) defines Service-Learning as a multifaceted concept encompassing diverse programs and approaches. It involves integrating academic learning with meaningful community service, creating opportunities for students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world issues. A decade earlier, Jacoby (1996) articulately defined Service-Learning.

> "As a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key components of Service-Learning." (p.5).

The definition of Service-Learning provided by Jacoby in 1996 encapsulates the essence of Service-Learning succinctly as a pedagogical approach. It underscores Service-Learning as experiential education where students actively participate in activities addressing human and community needs. It incorporates structured opportunities intentionally designed to foster student learning and personal development. Reflection and reciprocity, as integral components of Service-Learning, emphasize the significance of thoughtful contemplation and the mutually beneficial exchange between students and the communities they serve. This definition encapsulates the essence of Service-Learning, highlighting its multifaceted nature and the dynamic interplay between education, community engagement, and personal growth. Service-Learning, a dynamic approach to education, transcends the traditional boundaries of classrooms and extends into communities, fostering a dynamic interplay between students, institutions, and the societies they serve. Thus, Service-Learning is a teaching approach that empowers students to learn in the physical classroom and beyond their immediate environment.

Empowerment and personal transformation are central themes that beckon exploration and inquiry within this

context. This literature review embarks on a journey through the multifaceted landscape of Service-Learning, seeking to understand how it catalyzes empowerment and personal transformation. Empowerment Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) is at the heart of this exploration. This unique community-centered model has shown remarkable potential in fostering participants' resilience, self-efficacy, and civic responsibility.

Transformative learning proposition within the Service-Learning environment has garnered significant attention from scholars and experimenters. Mezirow (1991) is a prominent figure in this field, and his work has dramatically shown the disquisition of transformative learning. Mezirow's seminal work," Transformative Confines of Adult Education," introduced the conception of transformative learning, emphasizing that individuals suffer a profound shift in their perspectives, beliefs, and values through critical reflection on their guests. Dewey's (1938) influence on existential learning and his emphasis on reflection in the learning process bolster the substance of transformative learning, connecting these ideas to Dewey's educational gospel. Likewise, Cranton (1994) expands on Mezirow's ideas and explores the part of reflection in the transformative learning process, emphasizing that Service-Learning provides a structured platform for students to engage in reflective practice, leading to deeper understanding and particular growth.

In addition to Mezirow and Cranton, Eyler and Giles (1999) have contributed significantly to the converse on Service-Learning and metamorphosis. Their study punctuates the significance of integrating structured reflection into Service-Learning experiences, echoing Dewey's advocacy for reflective thinking in the educational process. Also, Taylor's (2007) research explores the neurological aspects of transformative learning, highlighting the cognitive processes that bolster shifts in one's worldview. This neurobiological perspective adds a dimension to understanding how Service-Learning may spark transformative literacy by engaging rational thinking, feelings, and unconscious processes. These scholars provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the part of the transformative learning proposition in Service-Learning, emphasizing the significance of critical reflection, existential engagement, and the connections to Dewey's ideas on existential learning and reflection.

Service-Learning is a combination of academic coursework and community service. Service-Learning. Community partners become co-educators, teaching students about community, diversity, justice, and social responsibility. The faculty then integrates these lessons with their course aims, aided by ongoing personal and in-class reflection activities. To effectively implement the principle of Service-Learning partnerships, it is imperative to plan the service component of the course collaboratively. Choosing partners is necessary before the semester starts and students finish their course. It would benefit partners to provide suggestions on how the course can prepare, assist, and enhance students' service contribution, such as selecting readings on relevant justice issues or creating functional assignments for the partner. The partnership necessitates ongoing communication and appropriate closure. To ensure effective communication and establish appropriate expectations, faculty members should collaborate with the community partner to create and sign a service agreement.

**Enhancing Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Sense of Purpose**

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are two key factors contributing to personal development, while self–efficacy and

sense of purpose are also essential components. In this section, we examine how Service-Learning shapes these individual development areas. In Service-Learning, a transformative journey unfolds for both students and the communities they engage with. This journey traverses through self-esteem, self-efficacy, and purpose, illuminating the profound impacts of Service-Learning experiences. As we delve into these topics, we explore Service-Learning's transformative potential. Service-Learning fosters positive change in communities, enhances students' self-esteem, boosts self-confidence, and finds a profound sense of purpose. Join us on this journey of exploring literature highlighting the transformative nature of Service-Learning and its role in personal growth and community development.

**Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a way to gauge one's overall self-value and sense of importance. What does this mean? The extent to which people value or enjoy themselves is indicated by it. Self-esteem, which includes self-worth and admiration, is a universal concept. Individual experiences, social experience, and one's self-perception are among the many factors that influence it. Self-esteem and self-acceptance are strongly linked to elevated levels of confidence. Service-Learning has been commended for its ability to enhance students' self-esteem and self–efficacy. Self-esteem is commonly regarded as a self-evaluative component of self-knowledge whereby the belief in the self may be positive or negative. Active participation in community service fosters a sense of self-worth and confidence among students in making positive contributions. According to the literature, participating in Service-Learning programs can significantly enhance self-esteem and self–efficacy, leading to a greater sense of self-confidence and trust in oneself. Developing self-esteem and self-sufficiency through Service-Learning is an ongoing process that enhances college students' overall development. Eyler and Giles (1999) state that Service-Learning significantly impacts the transformation process.

Per their statement, students frequently report a positive change in their self-esteem and ability to perform tasks due to Service-Learning experiences. Community service fosters a greater sense of self-worth and confidence among students and their ability to make meaningful contributions. This natural change reinforces and strengthens their self-worth, giving them a stronger sense of self-control and the confidence to contribute positively to their communities. Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999) built upon this foundation to explore the long-term effects of volunteerism on students through Service-Learning. The authors' findings were published in. The findings of their study underscored the long-term effects of Service -Learning on students' self-esteem and self–efficacy, which were significantly influenced by its influence on their overall personal development. It is evident from this that Service-Learning continues to shape and empower students, resulting in lasting effects on their self-esteem and self–efficacy, contributing to personal growth. Kiely (2004) widened the focus by examining international Service-learning changes.

While Kiely's focus extended to the global context, the essence of transformation remained a central theme. Local and global Service-Learning is akin to chameleon training with varying degrees of adaptability. The theme of Service-Learning emphasizes the transformative value it brings to students, enhancing their self-worth and capacity for success in managing complex situations and impacting society. In their work, Denson et al. (2019)

emphasized the importance of Service-Learning in shaping college students' sense of purpose and self-efficacy. The thorough examination reflects the viewpoints of Eyler and Giles (1999), Astin, Sax, & Avalos (1998), and Kiely (2004) on how self-esteem and self–efficacy can be considered as an essential aspect to develop within the larger context of personal development. Through Service-Learning, students can develop their self-belief, boost their confidence, and improve their work through positive reinforcement. These studies collectively demonstrate the powerful effects of Service-Learning on personal development, pointing to an increase in self-esteem and self–efficacy as critical components of this transformative process. Service-Learning in college results in a greater sense of self-esteem, an increased confidence in their ability to make 'a difference', and an overall positive change that will impact the person next year.

**Self-Efficacy and a Sense of Purpose**

Apart from boosting self-esteem and self-sufficiency, Service-Learning is crucial in cultivating a sense of purpose among students. Through their active involvement in community service, students become more aware of the connection between their studies and their purpose in life. These texts highlight the relationship between Service-Learning and students' academic lives, which helps them develop a sense of purpose that allows them to continue contributing to society. Implementing Service-Learning programs can transform students' lives, enhancing self-reliance and finding a common purpose. The literature highlights the significance of Service-Learning in these crucial aspects of personal development. Through Service-Learning, college students can develop their self-efficacy and purpose, significantly impacting their overall development. For example, Eyler and Giles (1999) provide extensive research on the transformative influence of Service-Learning, which is associated with increased self-esteem and self–efficacy. In addition, when students actively participate in servicing a community, they can develop a stronger sense of self-worth and rely on their abilities to make meaningful contributions. This intrinsic transformation bolsters their self-esteem and reinforces their self-efficacy, endowing them a more resilient sense of self and the belief in their potential to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Astin et al. (1998) contributed significantly to understanding the long-term effects of Service-Learning on students, emphasizing the importance of self-esteem and self–efficacy in personal development. Their research emphasized the ongoing impact of Service-Learning on students, leading to enhanced self-esteem and increased self–efficacy. Kiely (2004) widened the focus by examining changes in international Service-Learning. While Kiely's focus extended to the global context, the essence of transformation remained a central theme. Whether in the US or abroad, Service-Learning is like an army with complicated skills and abilities adaptable to different environments and contexts. Service-Learning holds significant promise in enhancing students' self-worth and competence while providing them with the tools to navigate and make positive societal changes. Among other things, Denson (2019), Lickel, and Crawford (2016) pointed out that Service-Learning is essential for personal development, particularly in helping college students feel more productive and have a sense of purpose. This thorough examination reflects the findings of other studies (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Astin et al., 1999; Kiely, 2004) by emphasizing the importance of self-esteem and self–efficacy in the larger context of personal development. Developing self-confidence, increasing self-confidence, and improving self–efficacy through Service-Learning leads to students having a more profound sense of purpose.

Moreover, Hart et al. (2007) assert that community service participation during early childhood can impact individual growth and potential involvement in society beyond grade school. Students' Service-Learning experiences, which foster a sense of purpose, significantly shape their development, and encourage them to engage in meaningful work. Holmes et al. (2022) found that Service-Learning can enhance students' engagement and commitment, which are closely tied to intellectual and personal development, by increasing their involvement and dedication. Other scholars (e.g., Greene, 2023; Gutzweiler et al., 2022; have pointed to the ability of Service-Learning to foster an emotional connection and create a sense of purpose among students. Collectively, these studies confirm the profound effects of Service-Learning on personal development: for example, self-esteem increases, self–efficacy increases, and a deep sense of purpose is fostered through critical elements of this transformative process. College students who undertake Service-Learning experiences tend to feel more confident in their abilities, believe they can contribute positively, and have a lasting sense of purpose that influences their personal growth.

**Studies in Service-Learning as a Sanctuary for Vulnerable Populations**

While the literature on Service-Learning is extensive, there is a noticeable gap in studies that explore the impact of Service-Learning within environments designed to provide sanctuary for vulnerable populations. Current studies often focus on Service-Learning in more traditional educational contexts, which do not always reflect the needs and dynamics of the shelters and sanctuaries they serve.

*Implications for Future Research* - Despite the limited number of studies in this field, it is necessary to conduct more research on Service-Learning in sheltered environments. Investigations could scrutinize the difficulties and prospects in these situations, considering the welfare and empowerment of the service providers (students) and the beneficiaries (shelter residents). Furthermore, research should identify best practices for conducting Service-Learning in sanctuaries and shelters, considering the potential for transformative learning and personal development.

## Results

The Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) program and its impact on the Hekima House community prompted us to investigate the transformative journey of college students who embarked on a unique Service-Learning journey. It involved crossing borders and cultures, immersing themselves in the daily lives of girls, and fleeing from the terrifying prospect of FGM. Through focus group interviews, participants (referenced in this study with pseudonyms) were asked to evaluate the impact of their 6-week stay at Hekima House and to determine if there were any significant changes in their perceptions. A similar approach was taken to obtain additional information from the Hekima House administrator. Both the students and the Hekima House administrators demonstrated the transformative potential of Service-Learning by sharing their experiences and how they profoundly impacted them and their civic consciousness while collaborating with the resilient community at Hekima House.

**College Students' Perspectives**

Participating college students markedly increased civic duty during their Service-Learning program. Beyond academics, there was a greater emphasis on involvement in and participation within society. The qualitative data demonstrated that these students were more involved in societal problems, being more willing to confront them and acknowledging their role as citizens. As the students entered the world of Service-Learning at Hekima House, they were on their way to experiencing profound changes in themselves and the community. Back home. Beyond the academic and service components of their experience, an undercurrent of profound change flowed through their encounters. The changes were, in a broad sense, more positive: increased confidence in oneself, greater self-worth and empowerment, an increasing cultural consciousness, and broader global acceptance. In the following voices, these students share their perspectives on how their Service-Learning experience not only impacted the girls they served but also left an indelible mark on their self-esteem, sense of empowerment, cultural awareness, and understanding of the interconnectedness of the global community. This study's qualitative outcomes provide insight into the transformative influence of Service-Learning course participation on the five college students. An in-depth investigation revealed several essential themes, emphasizing the profound effects of Service-Learning on students' personal development, social emancipation, self-improvement, and attitudes toward caring for others.

**Personal Satisfaction**

The students experienced a deep sense of fulfillment during their time at Hekima House, where they saw the tangible impact of their efforts on the girls' lives. For example, Emily said, "*I can't describe how fulfilling this experience was.*" Mark echoed this sentiment: "*Seeing those girls grow and flourish was immensely satisfying. It's like we left a mark on their lives.*" In contrast, Sophia shared a more reserved perspective, saying, "*While it was rewarding, I also saw the immense challenges these girls face, which left me feeling both fulfilled and concerned.*"

David had a more intrinsic perspective in his statement:

> "*Being at Hekima House was an eye-opener. In fact, the reason for it was not to benefit anyone; rather, it entailed the satisfaction of being included in something meaningful. For me, seeing the girls' faces illuminated when we shared our knowledge was a delight.*" [David]

These differing opinions on satisfaction highlight the complexity of Service-Learning experiences. Such encounters have a profound impact beyond one-dimensional perception. A few students at Hekima House felt incredibly valuable, the feeling of achievement that was only possible because of its positive impact on their lives. These students felt a profound satisfaction in knowing their efforts had a tangible, positive impact. In contrast, a few pupils could not overlook the complex issues that the girls encountered. They recognized that Service-Learning is not a one-sided journey; instead, it delves into the complexities of social issues. However, the harsh realities endured by these girls forced them to develop a more nuanced view of what it was like to be satisfied. Although they may not have been as satisfied, their stories and the more significant societal issues were deeply

impactful. However, diverse emotions and insights are woven together when experiencing satisfaction in the Service-Learning context. It embodies the joy of making a difference while acknowledging the complexity of managing global issues.

**Social Empowerment**

This study defines Social Empowerment as the ability of individuals or communities to acquire knowledge, skills, resources, and confidence to take charge of their own lives and are effective in society and its inhabitants. It includes the idea that people can impact and be involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives, particularly in community and social matters. Social empowerment is not just about personal growth but also about fostering a sense of responsibility and influence for the overall social welfare.

Hekima House's Service-Learning model incorporated the notion of social empowerment, which refers to the college students' experiences of being assigned responsibility for leading initiatives that directly affect the girls living there. That involved having the ability to be effective in their community and beyond through their actions. The girls benefit from the empowerment provided by the students through opportunities and support for their personal growth and social integration. The students at Hekima House were encouraged to feel more socially responsible.

Sarah articulated her experience:

> *"At Hekima, I felt a sense of social responsibility. My observation of the change around me led me to believe that community service is enormously important. This stay in Hekima House has left me aware of the positive impact that our college education can have on the lives of these girls and their families. It was more than just a sense of empowerment; it was an awakening to the collective strength that can be harnessed through Service-Learning."* [Sarah].

Emily also shared this personal experience.

> *"When I spoke with the girls, I observed their development, resilience, and the possibility of a positive outcome that our presence could bring about. I became connected to my own dreams and stories with a common goal. The connection was instrumental in our determination to make a lasting impact."* [Emily]

David added another voice, emphasizing,

> *"Our efforts were improving These girls positively, not just passive participation. Our faith in community service was reinforced by this type of hands-on experience, which also encouraged a strong sense of self-determination. It made us acutely aware of the fact that our actions had a direct and lasting impact. This realization was a remarkable moment in our Service-Learning journey, inspiring us to use our knowledge and skills to make alterations in the world."* [David]

It was a transformative experience, and the sense of empowerment that the students felt at Hekima House was highlighted by Mark.

*"Our Service-Learning journey involved being entrusted with leading initiatives that directly improved the lives of the girls. Thank goodness. As college students, we were able to experience immense empowerment through this trust and responsibility. The realization that our efforts could potentially impact the community was a result of it."* [Mark]

A powerful feeling of empowerment was felt at Hekima House, where students could contribute to service and social change. Sophia mentioned that the girls were experiencing some experiences that were common to their larger communities.

"*The experience at Hekima House did not diminish the importance of our work; it emphasized my own belief in the necessity of long-term, systemic change. That inspired me to think about the root causes and how we (as a society) can better address these problems. The girls and their community encountered many challenging situations despite our discussion on empowerment. This made our mission to create lasting change more challenging.*" [Sophia]

The transformational experience at Hekima House was profound; as David stated, it gave us all a heightened sense of empowerment. Our Service-Learning journey involved being entrusted with leading the way in initiatives that directly and positively impacted our lives. The combination of trust and responsibility was a tremendous boost for us as college students. The realization struck me that our actions could positively impact the community. The voices on social empowerment emphasized the importance of community-centered Service-Learning as a transformative approach. It was a powerful feeling to work at Hekima House, where the intense sense of agency that Sarah experienced is deeply felt, and her belief in community-driven service cannot be overstated. As David pointed out, the confidence and responsibility placed on them is a source of strength. Mark offers an alternative perspective, stating that empowerment requires a deeper comprehension of the issues within the community, raising doubts about their capacity to effect long-term change. This dynamic mix of experiences reveals the breadth and complexity of Service-Learning, including its potential for empowerment.

**Prosocial Identity**

The study identified prosocial identities, encompassing individuals' roles, values, and beliefs due to their engagement in community-driven service and interactions with society at Hekima House. Through their Service-Learning experiences, students develop social identities that include a sense of responsibility and purpose, which shape them as they strive to make measurable contributions. The emphasis is not on merely learning but on molding individuals.

Mark emphasized,

*"The Hekima House provided us with a sense of responsibility and prosocial identity, where giving back is deeply ingrained. Their experiences had a profound impact on our perception of community service, which we now consider to be an integral part of our identity. It was truly inspiring. Thank God for the opportunity! Now, it's part of our DNA—how we live. Hekima House was instrumental in the development of this perspective, and it's ingrained in our DNA."* [Mark]

They were able to adopt their behavior and values more effectively due to the Service-Larning experience, as noted by Mark. While at Hekima House, David urged the college's students to embrace an identity that prioritizes community and society. The concept of "giving back" became deeply ingrained in their character, and they now view it as an essential aspect of who they are.

*"Our role model status extended beyond teaching the girls; our aim was to inspire them through the power of education. We wanted to show them that knowledge is not just a tool for personal growth but also a means to create positive change in the world. By instilling this belief in the girls, we hoped to nurture their aspirations and empower them to reach for a brighter future. Our Service-Learning experience reinforced our conviction that education has the potential to transform lives, and we were eager to share this insight with the girls."* [David]

According to Mark, Service-Learning catalyzed temporary actions and resulted in enduring changes in their self-identity. Moreover, it reflects the determination of those pupils who will always be people contributing to society, knowing that it is part of their heritage. This transformation reflects the lasting impact of Hekima House on their development as individuals and, in turn, on how they developed their prosocial identities. One more student supported Mark's viewpoint by saying:

*"We didn't just teach the girls; we became role models, showing them that education can be a tool for positive change. By immersing ourselves in the Hekima House community, we not only shared our knowledge but also learned from the resilience and determination of the girls. Our Service-Learning experience deepened our commitment to making a difference, and we were determined to pass on this sense of purpose to the girls, igniting their belief in their own potential."* [Emily]

Emily's feelings further prove the profound impact of their Service-Learning experience at Hekima House. According to her, they were not exclusively responsible for tutoring the girls. Instead, they became influential role models, demonstrating by their actions that education can be a powerful tool for effecting positive change in one's life and the broader community. In addition to sharing their knowledge, the college students instilled hope and empowerment and recognized the potential of education to bring about change. Through their actions, they demonstrated that education is not merely about learning but also about using it to effect positive, meaningful change in both the individual and the larger society. While these voices were positive, Sophia, on the other hand, shared a slightly distinct perspective,

*"I know that developing a prosocial identity was enlightening during our time at Hekima House. It*

*transformed not only our girls at the House but also us . . . and not only as college students but also as foreigners to the local culture in Kenya. I would dare say we have become living examples of how education can be a powerful tool for positive change. Seeing the girls' confidence grow and their belief in their potential strengthen was incredibly fulfilling."* [Sophia]

She soon after that added:

*". . . however, this journey was not without its own challenges. It opened our eyes to the stark disparities in access to education, which can be disheartening. Witnessing these inequalities up close made me question the broader societal issues that contribute to them. It's a stark reminder that Service-Learning is not simple. It goes beyond just helping the girls with their immediate needs. It also involves throwing away  - and I'm not sure to what degree - the larger, more ingrained issues that keep some of these disparities going and growing."* [Sophia]

Service-Learning is a powerful tool that can help students shape prosocial identities, with most students acknowledging its potential as an enabling influence. Nevertheless, this revolutionary transformation is not without its harsh realities, particularly concerning the differences in education access. The students stated that Service-Learning fosters prosocial identities that prioritize contributing to society's advancement. They consider it a tool for self-improvement, thereby contributing to the betterment of their societies. Even so, the ideals concern more extensive obstacles female residents encounter at Hekima House, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this issue. Nurturing a Sense of Empathy

**Nurturing a Sense of Empathy**

In the current study, cultivating empathy involves cultivating and enhancing one's capacity to comprehend and communicate with others about their emotions, experiences, or thoughts. This involves developing a close emotional bond with people, hearing their stories, and experiencing their struggles and aspirations. As a result of their interactions with these individuals and their time spent in the community, the college students developed heightened empathy, which led to an enhanced feeling that they were more compassionate, caring, and concerned about others' well-being. Service-Learning led to the development of empathy, which significantly impacted the students' personal growth and commitment to making positive changes. Service-Learning at Hekima House led to a significant shift in the students' engagement with their fellow human beings, particularly their empathy. Their interactions with the girls brought them a level of empathy and understanding that they had not previously experienced. The below examples illustrate the students' developed views:

*"...empathy was a significant surprise during my time here. Occupying myself in these girls' lives, listening to their stories, and sharing their aspirations really enriched my level of empathy in a way I hadn't previously experienced. It was a quiet experience as it allowed me to shape these sorts of deeper connections and truly grasp their emotions and experiences as if they were my own."* [Mark]

Sarah resonated with this, stating,

> *"Empathy became the dynamo behind my actions and our actions at Hekima. And I know I can speak on this for every one of us . . . We couldn't help but wonder and care deeply for the girls and their futures. The more we connected with them and learned about their stories and dreams, the stronger our sense of empathy grew. It was as if their experiences became our own, and we were driven by a steady desire to make some sort of positive difference in their lives. Our activities were no longer just tasks; they were soaked with genuine compassionateness and a heartfelt devotion to support the girls in every way possible."* [Sarah]

However, Sophia offered a more tempered perspective,

> *"We were able to experience the emotional pain and hardship that many girls underwent. This was a mixed bag of emotions, but it wasn't the least challenging. Our empathy was high as we quickly connected with the girls, working hard to understand their difficulties, and participating in their aspirations. This was truly an unusual but also an inspiring experience. Our level of empathy and caring was evident, and we felt a strong urge to help them in whichever way possible."* [Sophia]

David added:

> *"On the flip side, we learned of the harsh realities of the girls' lives. They were a sobering reminder of their just unimaginable struggles. The practices in cultures and some sort of cultural norms led to these difficulties that brought them here* [Hekima House] *in the first place. Personally, it was just hard for me and for all of us to comprehend. I want to say that this realization caused a feeling of unbelievable sympathy. We, and I particularly, questioned the fairness of customs and really of the world these girls were born into—the obstacles they had to overcome even to get here. We were all faced with a mixture of emotions . . . remorse and a feeling of powerlessness as we couldn't do anything about it. It seemed to me that these conflicting emotions added involvedness to our service-learning journey. I know it convinced me that the mission before us was fulfilled, but I don't know how. Just to say that it is worth remembering them."* [David]

This reflects student perspectives on the complexity of their experience with empathy. While their experiences at Hekima House undoubtedly nurtured a profound sense of empathy, Mark's acknowledgment of the girls' "harsh realities" adds depth to the narrative. It underscores that their journey was a one-sided transformation and a complex interplay of emotions. Recognition of the girls' struggles highlights the importance of empathy beyond just compassion. It also acknowledges various challenges that individuals face while trying to assist others. According to Mark, Service-Learning can enhance empathy but needs to be considered balanced and thoughtfully.

Through sharing profound experiences, Hekima House fosters an intense sense of empathy within its community. Empathy became central to their actions despite the harsh realities of the girls' lives. Through their exposure to

the girls' daily experiences and struggles, the students underwent a transformation that resulted in greater empathy. This newfound empathy extends beyond mere understanding; it catalyzes their commitment to effect positive change. The student's capacity for empathy has been fueled by their desire to be effective and assist the girls in building thriving futures.

**Social Responsibility**

In the discussion of social responsibility, it is essential to consider the experiences of college students, which highlight the significant impact of their Service-Learning journey at Hekima House. Their understanding of how education shapes and improves society informs their perspectives. The students spoke passionately about the social responsibility they have embraced, transcending the confines of textbooks and personal gain. The advocates argue that education has the potential to revolutionize society. However, there was also a space for reflection that brought attention to the magnitude of this responsibility, acknowledging the immense hardships endured by the girls at Hekima House. A collection of perspectives in this section reflects the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the topics.

Besides the textbooks, the students acknowledged their greater sense of responsibility for social impact. Emily, for example, commented:

> "*We have a social responsibility that goes beyond personal gain; it is about using knowledge to contribute to society.*" [Emily]

David said,

> "*Hekima House showed us that education is a powerful tool for social change. We cannot turn a blind eye to these girls' issues.*" [David]

However, not all perceptions were uniformly optimistic. Mark noted,

> *"To me, I tend to think that the weight of social responsibility can sometimes feel overwhelming, at least for each of us, as we were, really, dealing with the horror of the challenges these girls endure, just listening to their stories."* [Mark]

Social responsibility is a significant aspect of this discourse that underscores the importance and potential of education in shaping society. Acknowledging this immense responsibility extends its reach beyond the confines of schools, fostering a collective understanding of its profound significance. The girls at Hekima House also find the complex issues they encounter to highlight the complexity and breadth of the problems they confront through Service-Learning. Hekima House is still essentially an oasis of empowerment and helps to heal both the mental and emotional body. As a haven, it is a space where the weight of social responsibility is keenly felt.

Nevertheless, it functions as a site where education's revolutionary potential is employed to incite positive change one step. Within this context, there is a collective understanding of the complex issues the girls at Hekima House encounter. It indicates the complexity that Service-Learning endeavors to overcome. Understanding adds complexity to the problems, indicating the necessary level of alteration.

**Commitment to Contributing Positively to Society**

At Hekima House, the students' dedication to making a difference in society was evident, leading to heightened awareness of social responsibility and personal agency. Their Service-Learning experiences caused a significant shift in their attitudes. They moved away from accepting the necessity of positive change and towards acting as catalysts for it, fully embracing their role as agents of social transformation. At Hekima House, their commitment to society was recognized as a high point where they became determined to make it happen and contributed to its preservation. For example, David fervently expressed a representative remark:

> *"Our dedication to contributing positively to society was kindled at Hekima House. We've witnessed the transformative impact we can have, and this commitment has now become a lifelong journey for each of us." Emily echoed this sentiment, declaring, "Also, our continued connection with Hekima House doesn't end when we leave; I personally see it as a lifelong mission to initiate positive change in the world, and we can begin there."* [David]

However, Sophia introduced a contrasting viewpoint to this unwavering commitment. As Sophia stood by her colleague, she exclaimed:

> *"While our commitment to society is unwavering, we must also acknowledge the complexity of these girls' challenges. The path to change isn't straightforward, and we must grapple with these intricate issues to make a difference."* [Sophia]

Sophia's viewpoint adds to the depth of their commitment to positively impacting society. Furthermore, she elaborated on the transformative influence of their commitment, highlighting the long-standing association with Hekima House. Her experience as an English language tutor with the girls revealed that she observed a remarkable improvement in their confidence and behavior during those sessions. Emily also narrated the initial instances where some girls were reluctant to speak English due to concerns about mistakes and judgment. A notable change began to take place as the days progressed, according to Emily. The girls' confidence in their language skills and self-confidence increased. They commenced lively discussions and exchanges, not just with Emily but also with one another.

These moments were a testament to the strength of the journey shared by the two college students at Hekima House. The change was not limited to understanding language; it was a shift towards confidence and recognizing their voices. According to Emily, this experience demonstrated the potential of these girls to have lasting effects on their lives beyond academics. With the girls, Emily began her mission to positively impact the world by

creating transformations that would continue beyond their time at Hekima House. Hekima House demonstrates the lasting impact of Service-Learning, as demonstrated by the students' unwavering commitment to inspiring positive change in their lives and through their teachings. The fact that they acknowledged the extent of the girls' problems is a poignant reminder of their mission, which is ongoing. In addition to cultivating civic duty, participation in Service-Learning courses dramatically increased the students' impression of their effectiveness. The participants acknowledged their increased self-reliance and confidence in the potential of their actions to make positive changes in their communities and beyond. Through Service-Learning, students gained real-life experience and witnessed the actual positive outcomes of their activities. They are more confident in their efficacy, which they attribute to this increased confidence.

**Hekima House Staff Perspectives**

We focused on the Hekima House staff as we delved into their perspectives and learned about the girls' transformational journey and the significance of Hekima's being a haven. Their roles in nurturing, guiding, and supporting these girls are instrumental in shaping the community within these walls. Our exploration of Hekima House's transformational story and the significance of this sanctuary to the lives they lead involves examining some aspects of the staff who play a crucial role in shaping their experiences. The voices of Josephine, the Director of Hekima House, and Pamela, its Matron, offer insightful insights into the girls' complex challenges and the significance of being a shelter. These interviews were conducted to identify Hekima House's commitment, empathy, and unwavering dedication. The staff's experiences and observations provide valuable context for the nurturing and empowerment within this environment. Understanding the broader social impact of Hekima House is enhanced by their commitment to creating a haven for these girls and contributing to their transformation.

**Hekima House as a Sanctuary**

Hekima House is not just a shelter for physical ailments but also teaches them life skills. It provides the girls with a haven from their immediate physical assault, and they are encouraged to seek healing and care. Their voices are heard, they learn to be confident, and the education they receive prepares them for success in life. This study used structured questions to interview Josephine (pseudonym), Hekima House principal administrator, and Pamela (house matron).

> *"Hekima House is not just a shelter; it's a sanctuary. Our primary goal is to create a safe, loving, and nurturing environment for these girls. We are deeply committed to their well-being and growth. To me, our board of governors and all our staff view this shelter as the home where our girls can heal, learn, and rediscover their dreams. The girls at Hekima House have faced unimaginable challenges, escaping from the harmful practice of FGM and early marriages. When they arrive here, they often carry emotional and physical scars. Our responsibility is to provide them with a safe space to recover and regain their strength."* [Josephine]

Pamela echoed Josephine's sentiments:

> *"I've seen firsthand how Hekima House transforms the lives of these girls. Our staff are not just caregivers; we're mentors, advocates, and family. We provide them with a stable and loving home where they can feel secure. Our girls are allowed to be free to express themselves, learn, and play without fear. They receive counseling, medical care, and educational support. But more than that, they experience the love, support, and encouragement they need to overcome their past."* [Pamela]

Hekima House is not just a shelter but also teaches and provides physical, emotional, and educational support. The themes of Josephine's and Pamela's answers are centered around their desire to keep the girls safe and supportive at Hekima House. Their statement emphasizes the sanctuary's mission and its profound sense of responsibility and care. Within its confines, the girls can escape physical danger and seek healing through care and support. Within this sanctuary, they regain their voices, build self-esteem, and receive an education that equips them with the tools to face a brighter future. The notion of Hekima House as a sanctuary acknowledges its broader purpose in fostering community, empowerment, and optimism. It recognizes the resilience and potential of these young girls, and it is a collective endeavor to preserve their lives and bring about positive change in cultural norms and the girls' development.

**Expectations from College Students**

The college students arrived at Hekima House with expectations shaped by their college's course requirements. They hoped for an immersive and innovative Service-Learning experience to challenge their beliefs, encourage personal development, and enhance their understanding of social responsibility. In parallel, Hekima House had its expectations for the students, hoping they would serve as mentors, role models, and educators for the girls. A transformational shift occurred due to the fulfillment of two types of expectations.

Josephine shared her expectations:

> *"When the college students arrived at Hekima House for Service-Learning, I hoped that they would be open to experiencing and understanding the challenges our girls face. I wanted them to engage with empathy, providing the girls with a supportive and enriching environment. We hoped that they would teach and learn from the girls, fostering personal growth and understanding."* [Josephine]

Pamela, the Hekima House matron, expressed similar hopes:

> *"Our expectations were high but also realistic. We wanted the college students to be role models and mentors to the girls, instilling in them the value of education, empowerment, and self-belief. We believed their presence would inspire our girls, and their experiences with the college students would be enriching and transformative."* [Pamela]

Josephine and Pamela shared a common vision of what they hoped the college students would bring to Hekima House: empathy, mentorship, and inspiration. Their standards reflected the trust in Service-Learning to bring

about positive change in the girls' lives.

**Impact of College Students on Hekima House Girls**

The college students' presence at Hekima House has aided us in comprehending the educational advancement and empowerment these girls have experienced. Through their actions, the Hekima House community has fostered a sense of hope and resilience.

> *"Sarah and David significantly impacted the educational support and empowerment of the girls at Hekima House. Their presence alone brings enthusiasm and a fresh perspective to the House. They provide tutoring and academic guidance, particularly in math and English, helping the girls with their studies and assignments. More than just academics, these college students serve as strong role models. Sophia is a creative artist, painter, and dancer. Mark was great with his sense of humor and confidence and never held back his comments in Swahili, limited as it was. Not just Sara and David, I cannot tell you how much all of them l showed the girls that education could be a powerful tool for positive change and personal growth. The commitment of each of them as individuals and as a team was remarkable, and it has instilled a sense of value and self-worth in our residents, including our Mwikali and our baby Monica. This will, in turn, positively affect their academic performance and overall development."*
> [Josephine]

Pamela added:

> *"I've seen firsthand how college students, especially Emily, Mark, and Sophia, and certainly all of them, have made a difference in the educational support and empowerment of the girls here. They offer individualized help with homework and studies, ensuring the girls grasp their lessons effectively. They created a nurturing learning environment, making education not just a task but an enjoyable experience. The girls look up to them, not just as tutors but as friends who genuinely care about their success. This added emotional support seemed, I'm sure, to have boosted the girls' confidence, making them more open to learning. College students like Sarah and Emily also organized workshops in technology, cake baking, and table games, just so much broadening the girls' horizons and enhancing their overall empowerment. It's not just about teaching; it's about creating a holistic educational experience."* [Pamela]

Hekima House staff, including Matron Pamela, were deeply moved by college students' profound effect on the girls. These students - Sarah, David, Emily, Mark, and Sophia - provided educational support and were inspirational role models. Their commitment and personal support fostered an intense sense of hope and resilience, as the girls turned out to be, making it possible for them to succeed personally and academically.

**Empowerment and Inspiration**

We explored the profound influence of college students on the empowerment and inspiration of the girls at Hekima

House. Further, we explore how their presence has kindled newfound self-esteem and aspirations among the girls, highlighting the transformative journey this Service-Learning experience has ignited. Following Josephine, she reflected on the influence of college students on these girls. Josephine's reflection on the impact of the college students on the girls yielded the following statement.

> *"These young people are amazing. They have been a huge source of inspiration for the girls at Hekima House. Just by being here, they show the girls that education can lead to a brighter future. Our girls have had the confidence to open up, converse with college students, and share their educational journeys and dreams in such a short time. This has given our girls a lot of hope and possibility. These five students' dedication to their own education has shown the girls that they can achieve their goals, too. As a result, our girls' self-esteem has risen, and they now believe in themselves and their potential."* [Josephine]

Hekima House matron echoed Josephine's sentiments and stated:

> *"The college students have really inspired our girls in so many ways. They have not only served as mentors in the areas of education but also as emotional support systems. Through their interactions in those six weeks, they have helped our girls build self-confidence, and they have begun seeing their own capabilities.*" [Pamela]

Pamela was quick to add:

> *"Our girls have been encouraged by the college students to set ambitious educational goals and have received guidance to help them achieve those goals. This support has led to a noticeable increase in the girls' self-esteem and aspirations. Most of them, if not all, are now more focused and determined to do better in their studies and reach for a better life. The college students' commitment and genuine care have been a big game-changer in their views and thinking.*" [Pamela]

This qualitative study provides a comprehensive and inclusive account of its transformative influence by examining the quantitative outcomes of the Empowerment-Focused Service-Learning (EFSL) program at Hekima House. Several important themes were identified in an extensive study of college students and staff members, focusing on the profound effects of Service-Learning on these individuals. This one-of-a-kind excursion spanned diverse cultural and geographical boundaries. Engaged in their work with the resilient community of Hekima House, these college students saw profound changes—in themselves and deeply within them—in how they perceived the world. The students, who initially arrived with their concerns, left the college feeling more emotionally present and committed to social justice and a firm conviction in the value of education. The girls' involvement with Hekima House was a significant factor in their personal development and continued to shape them to improve their lives. At Hekima House, the students' lives were made more meaningful and inspiring by their experiences, which gave them a sense of empowerment through hope and belief in themselves.

In the context of college students and Hekima House staff, Service-Learning has been a powerful tool for serving

society, not just through textbooks. Many have shared their experiences to this day. This emphasizes the mission's ongoing nature to bring about lasting change. It focuses on the complex problems facing these young women and their communities and how many people will address them. Through the EFSL program, Hekima House has become the destination of Salvation for its female residents, college students, and committed staff. This has allowed fresh perspectives on social responsibility, personal growth, compassion, and the girls' struggles.

## Discussion and Implications

This study explores how Service-Learning can significantly impact college students and their communities when integrated into scholarly teaching in Service-Learning courses. Its core focus is on intersecting themes of Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation at Hekima House. The transformational journey undertaken by the five college students is built around Service-Learning, a dynamic approach to education. Their experience living in the Hekima House demonstrates the profound impact that Service-Learning can have on individuals and their communities. Salvation has a multidimensional connotation in this context, as the girls' escape from FGM symbolizes their journey to physical and emotional salvation. The students' accounts depict the obstacles and successes linked to the quest for Salvation, evoking feelings, and contemplation. The qualitative findings of this study illuminate the transformative impact of participation in Service-Learning courses on the five college students. The thorough examination yielded several primary points of view, emphasizing the profound effects of Service-Learning. This study reveals clear implications for higher education and the wider community, particularly in developing Service-Learning courses. These implications are not confined to academia but extend to societal change's imperative. These results bolster essential implications for higher education and the broader society in areas such as Service-Learning. Beyond academics, these implications are relevant to the need for social change:

*Service-Learning, Salvation, and Transformation:* A prominent theme from our data reveals that Service-Learning emerged as a significant element of personal and social transformation. Students' interaction with the girls at Hekima House was a departure from orthodox academic expectations. The girls' journey transformed into a place of safety from harmful customs, and college students found retribution. A Service-Learning narrative that goes beyond the classroom into human Salvation is incorporated into this theme, signifying a significant shift in service providers and recipients.

*Personal Growth and Empowerment - A Two-Way Transformation:* The students' involvement with the girls at Hekima House significantly increased their self-esteem and empowerment. The theme emphasizes the transformative value of Service-Learning in fostering social empathy and responsibility among students. It showcases how the experience broadened their understanding of global issues and instilled a sense of duty and agency in addressing them. In addition, the girls at Hekima House gained self-esteem and confidence through their exposure to positive role models.

*Fostering Prosocial Identities:* Developing prosocial identities is crucial to Service-Learning. The students' involvement in this theme goes beyond academic coursework, as they also actively formed their identities and advocated for social change.

*Educational Support and Empowerment:* Service-Learning significantly impacted the empowerment and educational support of the girls at Hekima House. In this theme, not only were they the source of

academic inspiration, but they also served as role models for others. The girls' dedication and commitment led to greater self-assurance, which helped them achieve better grades and outcomes.

The qualitative outcomes of this research reveal the transformative influence of Service-Learning course participation on the five college students. Several key points of view were presented during the comprehensive analysis, highlighting the significant impacts of the EFSL model. These results reflect the implications for higher education and the wider community, especially concerning Service-Learning courses. Beyond academics, these effects are relevant to the necessity of social change and bolster essential implications for higher education and the broader society in areas such as Service-Learning. At Hekima House, we explore the intersectional themes of Service-Learning and salvation and transformation. The five college students are undertaking the transformational journey utilizing Service-Learning as their primary and most prominent component. They lived in Hekima House and learned about the profound effects of Service-Learning on individuals and communities. This is an excellent example. Salvation has multiple dimensions within this context. The girls' escape from FGM is a representation of their quest for physical and emotional salvation. The students' chronicles depict the arduous and fruitful journey toward Salvation, instilling powerful emotions and reflective reflection.

## Implications of the Study

This study's findings support essential implications for higher education and the wider community, with a particular emphasis on Service-Learning. Higher education institutions must now confront these implications to produce students who are empathetic, culturally aware, and initiative-taking in their efforts to tackle the world's complex issues. Additionally, the research is prompt, backing pedagogical methods that effectively incorporate Service-Learning. This also encourages universities to rethink ways of thinking so that their students can develop the skills, empathy, and cultural awareness needed to survive in an ever-changing world. Moreover, the research highlights the transformative value of Service-Learning in creating initiative-taking leaders who understand the critical issues of our time and can respond accordingly. Institutions, educators, and students must embrace Service-Learning to initiate personal and societal transformation. Higher education must undergo a paradigm shift to foster cultural awareness, empathy, and initiative-taking responses to the complex issues of our world.

The study demonstrates that Service-Learning can bring about personal and societal transformation, particularly in the areas of Salvation and empowerment. Additionally, the students' exploration of self-awareness, the formation of prosocial identities, and the significant impact on educational support highlight the potential of Service-Learning to produce emotionally responsive and socially responsible individuals ready to tackle global challenges.

## Future Studies

Earlier discussions have examined the various impacts and results of Service-Learning, emphasizing its beneficial effects on students' personal growth, self-confidence, and a sense of meaning. While the existing literature provides valuable information, it also highlights areas for further study and gaps, particularly in the Hekima House

context. Nevertheless, there are still many unresolved issues:

*Gap 1: Service-Learning in Protected Environments:* The literature on the effectiveness of Service-Learning in protected settings, such as teen girls' shelters, is lacking despite its potential to be a valuable pedagogical tool. Although there is some literature on Service-Learning in secure environments, it is often not specific enough to be applied to vulnerable populations. The gaps are problematic because they do not reflect these settings' specific needs, dynamics, and target populations. Consequently, future research should explore methods for improving Service-Learning in protected settings, considering students' unique needs and circumstances and the welfare and development of those they serve.

*Gap 2: Cross-Cultural Service-Learning:* A significant body of literature emphasizes cross-cultural Service-Learning (Hatcher et al., 2023; Greene et al., 2023; Schank et al., 2022), especially across borders. However, the Hekima House study is distinct in its cultural sensitivity, with students being unfamiliar with the cultural practices of the girls at the shelter. More research is needed on Service-Learning experiences that involve students working in culturally different environments and how this impacts their cultural competence and empathy.

*Gap 3: Service-Learning as a Sanctuary:* The literature fails to provide a comprehensive overview of Service-Learning as primarily experiential and educational, with some studies emphasizing shelter for survivors of domestic violence in service-based programs. The potential of Service-Learning in creating safe, empowered environments for disadvantaged groups should be examined in future research.

*Gap 4: Transformative Learning and Cultural Sensitivity:* The literature (Schank et al., 2022) also highlights the value of cultural sensitivity and transformative learning in Service-Learning. However, there is a need for studies that specifically address transformative learning in culturally sensitive contexts like Hekima House. These studies can provide insight into how Service-Learning can contribute to personal development and a greater appreciation of cultural diversity.

Finally, In the existing body of literature, there has been substantial exploration of the impacts and outcomes of Service-Learning programs. However, it is essential to acknowledge that there remain notable gaps, especially when considering the unique context of Hekima House. The literature on Service-Learning programs has been extensively examined for their effects and outcomes. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that there are still some significant holes, particularly in the context of Hekima House. These gaps in the literature represent opportunities for further inquiry and addressing them could lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Service-Learning in sensitive contexts. Addressing these gaps in the literature may result in a better understanding of Service-Learning in sensitive environments.

## Conclusion

This study has highlighted the transformative potential of Service-Learning, particularly when viewed in the context of Salvation and Empowerment. The college students' exploration of self-discovery, formation of prosocial identities, and their significant impact on educational support highlight the importance of Service-Learning in fostering empathy and social responsibility for individuals facing global challenges. This journey extended beyond the classroom, marking a profound transformation in service providers and recipients. Reflection

on transformational learning theory and the importance of reflection in determining academic and personal outcomes demonstrate that Service-Learning is not limited to academic knowledge but also a powerful tool for girls seeking refuge from harmful traditions and their empowerment through firsthand experiences. This narrative about Service-Learning is a departure from established models that transcend academia to promote transformation within oneself and the wider community.

This study highlighted the potential of Service-Learning to bring about personal and societal change, particularly in the areas of Salvation and empowerment. The students' commitment to fostering positive change, the development of prosocial identities, and the significant impact on educational support emphasize the potential of Service-Learning to shape empathetic and socially responsible individuals poised to address global challenges. The transformative power of Service-Learning, rooted in transformational learning theory and the significance of reflective practices, reaches beyond traditional education, fostering global citizens who are culturally conscious, empathetic, and initiative-taking in addressing the complex challenges our world faces. The purpose of this research is to inspire colleges and universities worldwide to rethink their pedagogical practices, explore novel paradigms with innovative ideas, and cultivate leaders who are committed to making a real difference in society. This statement urges institutions, educators, and students to embrace Service-Learning to initiate personal and societal transformation, leading to greater global empathy and social responsibility.

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