



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

## COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE LIFE SKILLS: A STUDY AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

**KEY WORDS:** Community Service, Life Skill

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## ABSTRACT

The UNESCO Position paper on Education 2015, states that education should aim at enabling and empowering people to realize their rights, fulfil their personal expectations for a decent life and work, and contribute to the achievement of their societies' socio-economic development objectives. It further states that the content of learning must promote acquisition of basic knowledge and cognitive skills, problem solving and creative thinking, understanding and respect for human rights, inclusion and equity, cultural diversity and foster a desire and capacity for lifelong learning and learning to live together. Education should enable the children to acquire these skills to live in a competitive world. Every experience becomes the center of one's learning. Our traditional educational system has given importance to develop skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. It is not enabling the children to meet the real-life situations like today's growing unemployment, poverty, inequality, violence and environmental destruction. It demands more life skills, abilities and creative learning potentialities. In this perspective, the researcher in this article proposes community service learning as pedagogy to teach life skills among school children. Community service as an outdoor learning is one of the best ways for children to develop their thinking, emotional and social skills. In this pretext, the researcher has taken the students of class 9 as sample and conducted a community service learning intervention study. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of community service learning on life skill development among school children. The method used is both quantitative and qualitative. The Life Skill Assessment Scale (LSAS) (Nair, et.al, 2010) is used for the data collection. The study has proved that community service is one of the best ways to enhance life skills among children and has enabled them to develop their skills and competencies.

## Introduction

Education is the most critical factor that contributes to the progress of any society. School education helps in the formation of a sound personality in children. Education, throughout life is based on four pillars such as learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Schools need to realize these four pillars as single and most important forum to reach out to the young population (Delors, J. et al., 2010). Our traditional educational systems gave importance to develop skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. But to meet the present day real life situations like growing unemployment, poverty, inequality, violence and environmental destruction, one is challenged to acquire and learn the contextual knowledge to face the fast growing society. Society demands more skills, abilities and creative problem solving potentials in school children as an outcome of education.

But schools in India today have become more and more academic and career based resulting in dichotomy between the text and the context. India's education has become institutionalized on acquisition of information, knowledge and technical skills leaving behind the importance of preparing students to learn the life skills which will empower them to live effectively in this world (Srikala and Kishore, 2008). The teachers are more concerned about finishing the content in their syllabus and to ensure each student scoring more marks. The scores in examination are considered as a yardstick of good education and the talents and the potentials of children not measured. The teachers are no more facilitators of learning rather become tutors. The holistic development of the students are not taken care of in the process of targeting ten out of ten score. Character building, citizenship development, competency building to face the challenges of day to day life is not taking place. Development of communication and interpersonal skills are not addressed. There is an unassailable inability in students to identify the risk factors. Their incompetence to make good decisions ends up finally in frequent failures and suicidal attempts (Suresh and Subramoniam, 2015). Moreover, increase in the trend of globalization and urbanization results in breaking of the joint families and traditional support system. The children coming from the nuclear families find it difficult to adapt to various challenging situations. The opportunity of these children to acquire values and skills toward wider horizons of social responsibility from their family is also diminished (Radest, 1993).

The question here is whether rote learning is acceptable and is an effective mode of education? Is higher scores in exams are only

leading to success in life? Is that the aim of education? Globalization has opened up vista of opportunity to the younger generation. The traditional perspective in education should change to address the needs of the global world. The combination of conventional and out-of-box approach is of utmost importance to lead a successful life in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Only then the students will be enabled to experience the three dimensions of education namely the ethical and cultural, scientific and technological, and economical and social. Education is a social experience through which children learn about themselves, develop their interpersonal skills and acquire basic knowledge and skills. This experience should begin early in childhood, in different forms depending on the situation, but always with the involvement of families and local communities (Delors, J. et al., 2010). If the school education system is very academic oriented then there will be less interaction between teachers and students and among their peer group. Fostering connectedness in schools makes the students feel genuinely accepted, comfortable, valued and free. As Kay in his study describes that all students need a rigorous education that offers skills to thrive in a complex, connected, and constantly changing world. When students leave school they must go with a deeper knowledge of academic content and with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which in turn, will help them apply their knowledge and work with others and manage their lives (Kay, 2009). Hence, it is by introducing life skills in all areas of school education, students will have academic engagement, belonging, discipline, fairness, linking school, student voices, extra-curricular activities, peer relations, safety and teacher support (Yuen, 2011).

## Life Skills Education

Life skills have been defined as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO 1993). '**Adaptive**' means that the person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. '**Positive behavior**' implies that the person is forward looking and even in difficult situations, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solution. UNICEF defines Life Skills as, "a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, Attitude and Skills."

Life skills are essentially those abilities that help a student to know oneself, describe one's feeling, give and receive feedback, think out of the box, set realistic and attainable goals, to think differently and employs problem-solving strategies (Yadav and Iqbal, 2012). Life Skills are gained through living life in interacting with others.

This art is learnt from life and for life. (Bhasin, 2016). Life skills help in promotion of mental, physical and social well-being (WHO, 1994). Life skill education promotes mental well-being in young people and equips them to face the realities of life. It empowers the adolescent to take more responsibility for their actions. Hence, to prepare the pupil to face the challenges of daily life, life skill education has to be a special subject in school to respond to the contemporary world (Mahmoudi and Moshayedi, 2012). Life skills are the building blocks of one's behavior and are used at every moment of life in various situations. Life skill based education through school curriculum to help the learners to positive approach to protect them and may help on individual to lead a holistic and fruitful life (Gulhane, 2014).

In this case, School can play a key role in developing life skills by making life skill education as part of the school curriculum as there is a decrease of moral values, high insecurity and negative thoughts among our upcoming generation (Ajith Kumar and Nair 2015). School is the best place to introduce life skills education because the children and adolescents are available in big numbers, we have the support of their parents and the local community, the availability of resources ( human and infrastructure), interaction and exchange of ideas among students with their peer group, short and long term evaluation etc., become possible ( Kurian, 2015). To make the life skills training more interesting and creative for the adolescents the methods or the approaches in teaching life skills has to be changing radically (Parmar and Katoch, 2015).

#### **Life Skills Education it's Importance for Adolescent**

Adolescence is often described, as an exciting transitory phase in the human life cycle but is perhaps the most challenging stage as well. This is a time when adolescents are constantly in search of their own identity. In searching for their identity many young people also feel alone and live without hope. (Khera and Khosla, 2012). During the 21st century, life globally, is undergoing significant transitions and changes. Among the most affected are the adolescents. Core life skills play an essential part in the adolescent who are the futures of our country. The researches have proved that the acquisition of socio cognitive and emotional coping skills shown their effectiveness in promoting desirable behaviors such as sociability, improved communication, effective decision making and conflict resolution, and preventing negative or high-risk behaviors (Yadav and Iqbal, 2012).

Adolescence is a period of experimenting, experiencing and expanding. Because of their peculiar behavior pattern their parents at times get frustrated with them and the adolescents in turn do not relish the idea of help and guidance from their parents. Thus, when children are sent to school to gain knowledge and form their character, the teachers become their partners in forming the child's formation process. Therefore, teaching life skills in schools have positive and secure study environment where there is a great co-operation of both students and teachers (Mahmoudi and Moshayedi, 2012). Life skills have a great role in enhancing adolescents into fruitful and healthy citizen of tomorrow. Adolescence need help and guidance in decision making, problem solving, empathy, critical thinking, developing interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with stress and coping with emotion (Kurian, 2015). The adolescent go through a period of transition which may be a challenging time for them both academically and socially. But introducing life skill training among high school students can have a greater positive impact on their academic performance and general behavior (Subasree, 2015). To prepare the adolescents to face these challenges of daily life, life skills education has to be a special subject in school which will respond to the contemporary world.

#### **Methods to Impart Life Skills**

There are various methodologies to impart life skills among students such as class room teaching in life skills, training in life skills, and experiential learning. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2005) reports that the content of life skill programming was not always relevant and appropriate and the methods used were not always effective particularly with regard to the different type of learners. Many programs have not given

provisions to support learners in the use of their life skills outside of the classroom, with their families or in their communities. Newer methods like class discussions, brainstorming, role plays, audio-visual activities such as arts, music, theater, dance, story-telling, debates, sports etc., are used as a medium for life skill education. Community service learning is one unexplored area to develop life skills. Therefore, the researcher's aim is to propose community service learning as one of the best pedagogy to teach life skill education which will have greater impact among the school children. The researcher attempts to prove that Community service learning is an indirect strategy to enhance the life skills in school children.

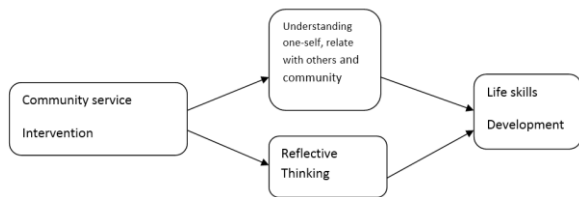
#### **Community Service Learning as a Contemporary Approach to Teach Life Skills**

Community service refers to service that a person performs for the benefit of his or her local community. Community service activities in a school setting are experimental practice that students require to apply to their theoretical knowledge. Community service learning is an experiential learning that nurtures social and cognitive skills, improve problem-solving, team-building, leadership, communicative and organizational skills (Demir, et al., 2014). Community service, as consistently reported by researchers is a heightened sense of social responsibility. It develops a positive attitude towards adults and others, understanding and active exploration of careers, enhancing self-esteem and growth in moral development (Hedin, 1989). Community service experience encourages youth to feel more self-competent to discover commonalities with a broad range of people, and a more encompassing and integrated understanding of social, moral and political issues (Yates and Younnis, 1996). As Kackar-Cam and Schmidt describe in their study, "adolescence who are involved in out-of-time activities more motivated and cognitively engaged in comparison to other context of their lives" (Kackar-Cam and Schmidt, 2014, p.84).

In community service learning, students have a chance to experience different type of activities which will help them to shape their career interest later in life. Most adolescents will be able to come out of their nervousness or shyness and start to interact with people they do not know. One of most important benefits of community service is that it instills in students a strong feeling of self-worth. Community service learning gives students an experience in expressing their opinions in front of the adults thereby increasing their confidence (Niemi, R.G et al., 2000). Camara. F (2012) explains in her research that students would learn more effectively and become better citizens if they are engaged in service to the community and have this service incorporated into their academic curriculum. For learning does not take place in the classroom alone, it takes place after school, on the weekends, on the playing fields, in the music room, and while students performing community service. She proves in her research the numerous benefits of community service such as growth in self-esteem, future engagement in political and civic interactions, creating a sense of citizenship and above all improvement of academic performance of the students. Community service learning is seen by the various Boards of Education as an integral part of education. In the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) life skill training programme has become integral part of the student evaluation system, Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) and Indian School Certificate (ISC) syllabus of class IX -XII (2015) 'Socially Use Productive Work and Community Service' was given emphasis on work practice and classroom discussions. It has suffered partly because it has been mentioned after SUPW and, hence, is seen as less important, but more because it is the less easily realizable.

Community service is an exciting topic for developmental research because it directly addresses both theoretical and applied issues. Moreover, researches have proved that community service as part of the school curriculum can eventually enhance meaningful value development (Hedin, 1989). In many Jesuit schools, community services are common strategy for ensuring that graduating students who are open to growth, intellectually competent,

religious, loving and committed to doing justice (O'Keefe, 2015). Students who are involved in social service program encounter themselves and others and find meaning in life (Su et al., 2014). The students involved in community service activities gain a sense of social responsibility and a deeper understanding of the problem faced by the communities in which they serve (Koh et al., 2014). Students involved in community service report that their fears and prejudices diminish by the experience of helping others (Herzberg, 1994). Therefore, the aim of the researcher is to investigate the possibility of whether community service as pedagogy of learning will effect in bringing out the ten-core life skills among children.



Student's life skills can be developed if they involved in number of well designed community activities. Each activity should be followed by some reflection which will help them to learn from their experience. Based on this a pilot study had been done by the researcher with the help of structured community service intervention.

**Objectives**

- To develop and introduce a community service learning module for the high school children.
- To measure the impact of life skill development among those who involved in community service.
- Hypotheses
- Community service learning has impact on school children's life skill development.
- There is a significance difference in life skills between pre and post community involvement.

**Methodology**

Life skills assessment scale (LSAS) developed by (Nair, et.al, 2010) is used for the data collection. It is a standardized questionnaire having reliability of 0.84 and validity 89%. The multi-dimensional life skill assessment scale consist of 100 items in the form of statements in built with the 5 point Likert scale for the respondent to check the appropriate response which is most descriptive of him/her. It has got both positive and negative items. The scale measures 10 dimensions of life skills such self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, creative thinking, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, coping with emotions and coping with stress.

**Sample of the study**

The sample for the present study was collected from among 9th standard students (only girls) between the ages 14 and 15 from Loreto House School, Kolkata. The sample size was 45 students. The purposive sampling method was used.

**Community Service Learning Intervention**

Children were involved in 8 community service learning activities. Each activity was of one hour duration. The eight activities were spread out for two months. They were divided into small groups and discussed the nature and process of the activity. A teacher accompanied the students whenever the students were doing any activity. No physical strain was recorded as it was both fun and learning. After every activity the children filled in the reflection sheet.

**The activities were as follows:**

- Visit to an Orphanage
- Food prepared and shared with the deserving
- Go Green March
- Painted the trees to protect from insects
- Tagged names on 80 trees in the school campus
- Visited the differently abled Children

Raised fund to help hunger and disease  
Spent memorable time with visually impaired children

**Result and Discussion**

Table 1 indicates the difference between pre and post on all the dimensions life skills among children who were involved in Community Service Learning intervention study.

**Table 1**

Dimensions		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	't' Value
Self Awareness	Pre-test	44.825	40	5.158450871	3.026
	Post-test	35.2	40	4.530240272	
Empathy	Pre-test	39.025	40	5.581505633	0.000650409
	Post-test	35.3	40	3.962646099	
Effective Communication	Pre-test	28.275	40	4.169409354	0.202117344
	Post-test	29.125	40	4.524505923	
Interpersonal Relationship	Pre-test	37.95	40	5.252349901	0.386486687
	Post-test	37.675	40	5.254485264	
Creative Thinking	Pre-test	28.85	40	3.355439518	0.0700914
	Post-test	29.7	40	4.255915943	
Critical Thinking	Pre-test	37.5	40	4.454902226	0.156565315
	Post-test	36.4	40	6.823037898	
Decision Making	Pre-test	37.3	40	4.333530568	0.414961332
	Post-test	37.1	40	4.567443318	
Problem Solving	Pre-test	33.55	40	4.629614815	0.206717591
	Post-test	34.325	40	4.637569545	
Coping with Emotion	Pre-test	36.4	40	6.08824003	0.065309894
	Post-test	37.9	40	4.797435212	
Coping with Stress	Pre-test	26	40	4.568565954	0.001079566
	Post-test	28.9	40	4.068641807	

As a result Community Service Learning intervention in both pre and post test clearly indicates that there is Significant difference in effective communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem Solving, coping with emotion and coping with stress. No significant difference in self awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, and decision making. Exposure to different experiences and situations could have brought out better results in self awareness and empathy. If the duration as well as the activities were more, there would have been more impacts on life skill development of children. Repetition of activities can lead to more positive effect in life skills.

**Limitations**

The study was constrained only to Loreto House School. The sample size and duration was less. The major limitation was to get time within the school hours for community service activities. Only the girls were involved in the study.

**Conclusion**

Community service learning activities have shown impacts on life skill development among school children. It could be considered as pedagogy to teach life skill. It brought positive changes towards community work and it created attitudinal and behavioral changes in children. Apart from being regular to the activities the children also enjoyed working in a team. They felt comfortable to share their views and they were very happy that they did something productive. By introducing community service learning as a part of the school curriculum we can bring up a generation that is creative, realistic and productive for a peaceful co-existence between text and context.

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