

## **The Impact of Community Service Projects on Enhancing Students' Leadership Skills, Case of Jordanian Schools**

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### **Abstract**

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*The community service projects are essential in assisting the students in obtaining leadership skills that are important to make them self-sufficient. The leadership skills may make students be productive team leaders in schools. These skills entail trustworthiness, empathy, effective communication and how to delegate. When students nurture leadership skills through community learning, this assists them to create a positive and productive environment that may help them to yield excellent work performances, especially in schools. Also, leadership skills like empathy, trustworthiness and knowing how to delegate can make students command both love and respect as well as absolute devotion from others, and this may propel the whole school scale to new success levels that looked unachievable earlier. This reveals that Community service initiatives impart students with skills that make them self-aware and possess unique abilities that are necessary to develop other skills needed for personal and professional life. Community engagement is both a learning and teaching concept that schools are adopting to help improve the learning experience, impart civic responsibility and develop the communities. Jordan is encouraging its learning schools to pick up the learning strategy that will help improve the perception of the students in the job sector and help improve the society. The paper will focus on understanding the impacts of the community service projects on the students and the community.*

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**Key Words:** Community service projects, Community Service Learning (CSL), Leadership, Community Engagement, Social Responsibility.

### **Introduction**

Community service projects entail experiential learning where the students have to engage with the practical part of their course in the actual community. This is typically beneficial to both the learner and the greater society. Students are an important part of any community because they determine the future of that society, but they require guidelines to help them work towards a successful future. The CSL is, therefore, an integral part of learning that nurtures students' skills that they will utilize in the future to improve the world around them. Implying that students often acquire knowledge to help them generally improves their lives and the entire community. Community projects vary from one community to the other. However, in this case, Jordan ensures that its learning schools help with giving probable requirements for their students. Some of the examples of community projects in Jordan include environmental protection and recycling, human rights, the friend project, youth, and democracy project, smiles planters' project and civic education project among others. These are some of the community projects that learners often enroll in to enable them to develop professional competence which is essential in leadership.

The Jordanian education system integrates students from different fields of specialization, who have identified the benefits of CSL. Students are actively involved in staff and self-evaluation, which makes it easier to identify individual and group goals while maintaining a high quality of instruction. The political and economic state of Jordan makes service learning very demanding which makes it difficult to implement within a short time period. The implementation of CSL in some Jordanian schools have shown that; it enriches understanding of the curriculum, increases general awareness of current issues in their society, improves interpersonal skills, promotes the development of civic responsibility and broadens the perspectives of diversity and enhances the critical thinking skills.

The principal objective of these initiatives is that it presents students with the opportunity to explore both their strengths and weaknesses. CSL is crucial towards helping students to acquire defined leadership skill that is important for effective communication, building trust, empathy and creating a positive relationship in schools (The 8 Most Important Leadership Skills You Need, 2018). These leadership skills that students can acquire from community projects are significant in helping students be innovative, problem solvers and be charismatic leaders which are good for the future of Jordan. The Jordan government is taking the initiative to invest more in the community service projects as a way to train students and help develop its society, at the same time thus most of its learning schools are making it part of their curriculum. The most common outcomes of the community service projects include the imparting of general knowledge to the students, teamwork, understanding the community, applying theory to actual life situations and improve on social responsibility and awareness.

## **Literature Review**

### **Influences of Community Service Learning on Students**

According to Davis, he describes CSL as an example of experiential learning that ensures that both student and the community benefit. The students are presented with an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience while on the other hand, the society benefits from the services and outcomes of students practicing the skills (2015). CSL is different from other learning programs such as internships, volunteering among others that are beneficial to one party. Jordanian students are provided with an opportunity to participate in CSL, as it gives them additional social skills that are not included in the curriculum.

Many schools in Jordan recommend CSL strategy to help students explore the knowledge they have learned inside the classroom in the real world (Beatty, 2017). During the CSL, students always have the opportunity to improve on their personal, social and educational outcomes. Thus, explaining why the learning schools have started incorporating CSL to all students to evaluate their understanding regarding the content, they have learned in class. This improves their cognitive development to enable them to be innovative and critical thinkers. This is essential towards enhancing social outcomes regarding community service involvement to help eliminate current issues that disrupt normal livelihood. It is possible that students can have the necessary knowledge from the book but fail in executing their practical requirements to the community. In Jordan, the society is not as liberal and diverse as it is in a place like America. The students are thus mainly brought up in environments where they do not get to interact with culturally and ideologically different people. The CSL strategies motivate them to move outside their comfort zones and interact with those different than them. This has been attributed to the rejuvenation of the Jordanian education system, with hopes that education in the country will inspire future generations to welcome much-needed changes in the country. Thus it is essential to embrace CSL to help them acquire skills that will enable them to be socially responsible. Most learning schools require their students to take part in CSL before embarking on the proper course learning because it helps them prepare or understand what they are looking for in the practical part of their course (Beatty, 2014). The students are also to have a better perspective of what their future job opportunities are, make better choices and work on the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills which will help them build their careers. Jordan is attempting to create more employment opportunities for their graduates, as a way of promoting local professionals. In this regard, CSL strategies change with international education standards to keep local students at par with the rest of the world.

## **Research Body**

### **Community Service Projects improve on Learning and increase graduating rates**

Community service projects are essential towards building the students' leadership skills through ensuring that they succeed in their education. According to Wade (2017), the community learning projects help improve the students learning outcomes because they gain a vast knowledge on their topic relevant to their learning. CSL allows students to engage more in their studies because even when working in the society, they will be learning more activities pertinent to their curriculum that help improve their performance in class.

The community projects are essential to the students because they learn to relate their education to the actual world. The students while engaging on their quest for constructing buildings in the community they still end up learning how to apply their class skills in the actual world and interact with the other employees on the ground (Tucker et al., 2018). The Universities in Jordan have identified several key objectives of service learning including the development of quality assurance and control systems and preparation and training of students for international service.

Additionally, cross-cultural learning and understanding through working together and maintenance of robust community engagements drive the CSL programs in Jordan. The universities that have fully adopted CSL have provided sustainable methods for delivering on their mission statement. They provide students with the necessary tools for initiating development within the local communities and equips them with problem-solving skills.

### **Community service projects influence personal attributes essential for leadership**

The community projects are critical to building an individual's character because they have to indulge with numerous people on the working levels. It is crucial that a student in a specific working program will engage more with different employees and clients that help build them in such a working environment that is realistic to the real world. CSL helps students develop a great sense of spiritual growth, personal identity and efficacy, and development of morals all that is essential for leadership responsibilities (Sheffield, 2015). People will identify their traits, how they fit in different social circles through community service learning programs that will then reciprocate to their attributes essential for leadership. Personal and professional responsibility are essential leadership qualities which are boosted by CSL in major local universities. Societal change in Jordan is promoted by the personal growth of the students, to mentally prepare them for the challenges they will face in the world after they leave school. Consequently, CSL inspires the students to seek internal motivation to improve their academic and overall curriculum performance making them capable of competing in the local environment and internationally.

### **Community service projects help improve an individual's social skills**

The community service projects reduce stereotypes and instead help improve on the intercultural understanding that is an essential leadership skill. Karasik & Wallingford (2017), suggests that all leaders should have an open mind concept towards all the citizens in that they will get to deal with numerous people and from different cultures. For example, Jordan is a cultural country, and thus the students have to learn to appreciate all the cultures and the service projects should provide the environment for the student to obtain such traits. Stereotypes are universal; they affect how a leader views other employees, and thus community service projects will help the students learn that it is not appropriate to base their judgments on stereotypes.

The program helps improve on taking part in community services such as donating blood, planting trees, collecting garbage, creating awareness regarding social issues to the other youths among others. Jordan is a communal country where people's lives depend on others which is essential for the outcome of the community. Community service learning is helping the students interpret their education by dedicating it to the various projects in the community (Day, 2013). Most of the higher learning schools in Jordan have adopted the concept that is making it easier for them to take part in community building. Munshi explained that the students grow up understanding that they have a role to play in the society and each leader should possess it because it guarantees their productivity and success (2014).

### **Community service projects help in career development**

Community service projects are important in career development in that the students gain practical knowledge that helps them understand what they want to do with their lives. For instance, the higher learning schools provide students with the necessary education without the proper training that they can gain from community service projects. A student taking any course in Jordan can find more incentives after interacting with the community members and pursues more ideas about what he or she wants to achieve in their preferred field (Crawford, 2014). A student can choose to become an aid doctor or doctor without borders because he or she wants to give back to the community.

The students can obtain more working opportunities from their training centers that are a result of community projects. Wang et al. explained that the supervisors could become referees to the students on their conduct in their work on some projects that make it easier to get more working opportunities (2016). For instance, a student taking part in the environmental related program at the University of Jordan can indulge in community projects such as tree planting or collecting garbage. The lecturers can become referees, or the local environment department can provide them with job opportunities. Taking part in the community projects is healthy for the students' careers because they will have the training, the expertise and the chance to work there and earn a living or gain positive recommendations that will open more careers doors.

### **Community service projects help students build community awareness**

Students break from their learning norms and start adopting a real-life lifestyle that is a result of the community service projects. Lawson et al. explained that the students engage in projects that are positive to the community and within their training course that makes it easier to influence the town (2017). The program starts with one school, maybe in a specific department such as medicine, but it later spreads among students and spreads to other schools. Most of the higher learning schools in Jordan are picking up the idea that started at the University of Jordan, which is a result of community awareness. The concept is positive to student's leadership skills because they learn how to have a constructive impact on other students and the community members (Butcher et al., 2013). As much as community service learning helps students improve their learning skills they also help, the government to develop their communities. Students through the projects learn to understand other people, and it is a positive trait for a leader because they have to take time to build a working relationship with their employees that is essential for any working place.

### **Conclusion**

Community service projects refer to activities in the communities that the learning schools recommend for their students that in turn, help training and giving them experience in their fields and help build the community. The projects vary depending on the necessities in the community thus all the students cannot miss an opportunity to help develop their community, and it is essential that students select programs relevant to their careers. The selection is significant because it has to be beneficial to the student thus has to have relevance to their jobs and within their comfort, for them to perform better. Community service projects are essential in nurturing and developing student's leadership skills through the provision of opportunities, training, social skills, improving their performance in schools, and personal attributes among others. Students require proper training and experimenting in their career that has become common in Jordan. This seeks to improve its education sector while it helps in the general developments in its communities.

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