

**Proposal for a Poster Presentation**  
**The impact of International Service-Learning on student development of skills, social awareness and level of happiness**

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**Abstract:**

This paper contributes the file of Service-Learning by providing evidence for the impact of International Service-Learning (ISL) on the student's development, in term of skills, awareness, social responsibilities and level of happiness. The paper also indicates the important role of teachers and instructors in student's development during ISL projects: students who were supervised/guided by instructors and teachers had stronger development than those who were simply volunteering on their own. The research has been done in Cau Ke district, Tra Vinh province, Vietnam, where 193 students from Singapore joining ISL projects held by ECO Vietnam Group from March to June of 2018. The paper hopes to increase the confidences in Higher Education in developing more ISL projects.

**1. Introduction**

Recently, there is high demand of sending students to overseas for ISL. ISL is very complicated field since it involves a lot of different stakeholders, logistic arrangement, culture sensitivities and difference perspectives.

ECO Vietnam Group (EVG) is a non-profit organization, pioneering in promoting sustainable development of the Vietnamese communities through Service-Learning (SL) model. EVG is established in 2009 with the missions of (1) empowering volunteering works and the development of remote areas and (2) creating the educational environment in which youth can improve skills and social awareness. Since its establishment, EVG has been hosted successfully 105 ISL at 10 rural communes with the participation of 4000 volunteers from Vietnam and abroad. EVG has partnered with many institutes such as The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Nanyang Technological University- Singapore, National University of Singapore, and Ngee Ann Polytechnics to develop different ISL for their students.

There is not much research on the impact of ISL on the student development. Will ISL with short project periods make real changes in students' skills and social awareness? What is the key factor in ISL to increase the learning experience of students in ISL? Those questions inspire EVG conduct a small research about the impact of ISL project on student development of skills, awareness and attitudes.

## 2. Theoretical framework/literature review

Learning from serving the community (Service-Learning) is defined as a learning method in which students participate in the community services whose the purposes of tackling a practical demand of the community, then gain more knowledge from the school curriculum, sharpen the self-discipline and community awareness (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The theoretical knowledge will be linked together to figure out the solution for recently community's problems. Those problems are not written down clearly on textbook. It exists in real life concept, the maze of social situations, art, religion and history.

SL enables students to develop their moral virtues and comprehension of principles of society. It helps students adapt to diverse environments, tolerate the differences of various communities and cultures, enrich their perspectives of life which contributes to form the lateral thinking.

Recently, there is high demand of sending students to overseas for ISL. ISL requires a lot of the involvement and partnership with different stakeholders such as local people, local government, and local NGOs. It also requires a lot of logistic arrangement, culture sensitivity and certain respect for different perspective. Despite it all, ISL has a high potential to be one of the most effective instructional and learning tools in higher education. Students who participated in ISL project also gain global competence and they become more aware of their role as global citizen (Brown, 2011, Bringle, 2008; Skelly, 2009).

## 3. Methods/analysis

Hypothesis 1: Skills, attitudes and social awareness of students who joined ISL have been changed positively.

Hypothesis 2: Groups of students who have their teachers take part in ISL have had better experiences and improved more than the groups without teachers.

The research has been done in Cau Ke District, Tra Vinh Province where ISL took place from March to August – 2018 with the students from different schools/institutes of Singapore. There are 193 college and university students from Singapore joining ISL projects held by ECO Vietnam Group from March to June of 2018. A pre and post-project survey was conducted at the beginning and at the end of the ISL.

In the pre-project survey, students evaluated their skills and social awareness. Reasons for participating and their expectation are also asked. Regarding to the post-project survey, in addition to evaluate on students' skills and awareness, they evaluated the satisfaction level of project benefits. Besides, there are several open questions for the students.

Each ISL lasts for ten days in the chosen community. Local constructions to support the need of basic facilities at rural areas and teaching Science and English to local children are main activities.

Moreover, there are some cultural exchange activities for students such as farming, poor households visit, Singapore-Vietnam cultural exchange and Vietnamese language and history classes.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 5.1. Demographic Characteristics

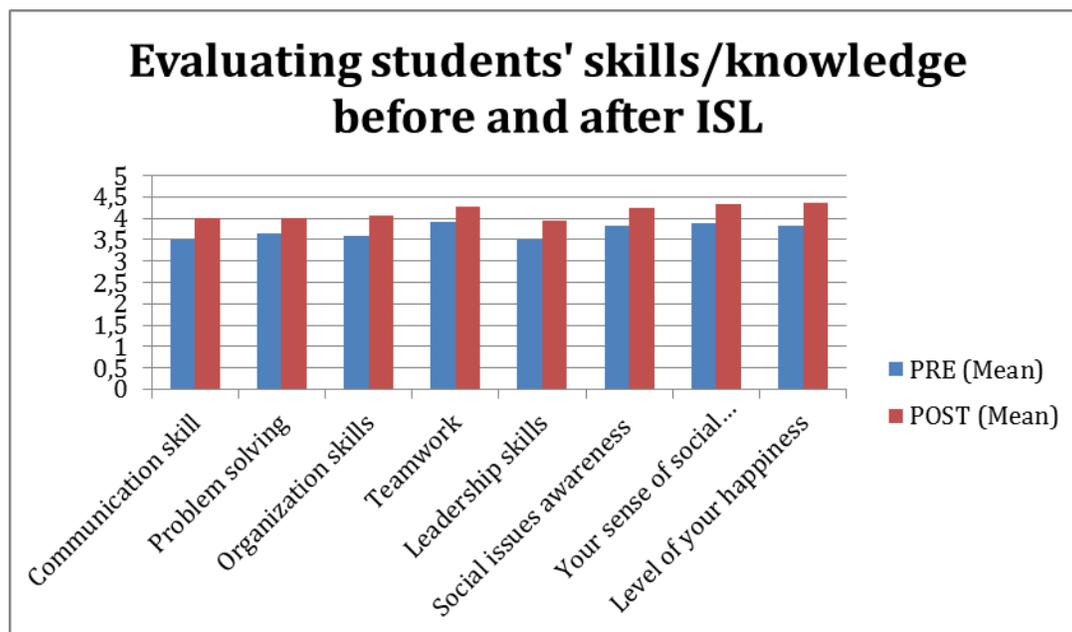
Particularly, five groups were from university level. Two groups were college students from Polytechnic and one group was from junior college. According to their educational levels, participants' age fell into 17-23. Most of them have volunteered before at their own country.

##### 5.2. H1: Skills, mindsets, attitudes and social awareness of students who joined ISL have been changed positively.

Students are asked to assess their skills and knowledge on the scale from 1 to 5:

- 5 = Excellent
- 4 = Good
- 3 = Average
- 2 = Fair
- 1 = Poor

**Chart 1** shows the result of students' soft skills, social awareness and level of happiness between pre-project and post-project.



**Chart 1: Result of pre-project and post post-project.**

SKILLS	PRE (Mean)	POST (Mean)	DIFFERENCE
Communication skill	3.51	4.02	0.51
Problem solving	3.64	4.01	0.37
Organization skills	3.60	4.07	0.47
Teamwork	3.92	4.26	0.34
Leadership skills	3.49	3.94	0.45
Social issues awareness (inequality education, accessibility,...)	3.83	4.23	0.40
Your sense of responsibility in serving the society	3.90	4.34	0.44
Level of your happiness	3.84	4.35	0.51

**Table 1: The average score of skills assessed in pre-project and post- project survey**

**Chart 1** and **Table 1** has proved the impact of ISL on the students development in communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills; social issues awareness; sense of responsibility and level of happiness.

5.3. H2: Groups of students who have their teachers take part in ISL have had better experiences and improved more than the groups without teachers.

Some student groups came with teachers in charged and some groups came without teachers. The data collection's result is shown at Table 2.

	Group of students without instructors/ teachers in ISL			Group of students with instructors/ teachers in ISL		
	Pre (Mean)	Post (Mean)	Difference	Pre (Mean)	Post (Mean)	Difference
Communication skill	3.45	3.96	0.51	3.60	4.11	0.51
Problem solving	3.68	3.99	0.31	3.58	4.03	0.45
Organization skills	3.63	3.99	0.36	3.55	4.19	0.64
Teamwork	3.88	4.15	0.27	3.97	4.43	0.46
Leadership skills	3.50	3.89	0.39	3.48	4.01	0.53
Social issues awareness (inequality education, accessibility,...)	3.82	4.09	0.27	3.85	4.45	0.60
Your sense of responsibility in serving the society	3.86	4.19	0.33	3.96	4.58	0.62
Level of your happiness	3.74	4.15	0.41	4.00	4.68	0.68

**Table 2: The data result between the Group of volunteers with instructors/ teachers and the Group of volunteers without instructors/ teachers**

As can be seen from the **Table 2**, the students group with the teachers has showed more improvement in skills development, sense of social responsibility and level of happiness than the groups without the teachers. Some criteria with significant differences between two groups: Level of happiness (0.41 & 0.68), Organization skills (0.36 & 0.64), Sense of responsibility in serving the society (0.33 & 0.62), Social issues awareness (0.27 & 0.60).

The conclusion can be drawn that groups of students with instructors/ teachers achieve the impact more than groups of students without instructors/ teachers in the ISL. Instructors/ teachers' experience and knowledge will help the students to learn more through sharing and reflection activities during the ISL.

#### 5.4 Student's reflection:

In the survey after the project, we also asked the students what they have learnt from the project and how they will apply these questions back home?, a few sharing from the students below:

“I learnt to appreciate my environment more as we are actually extremely privileged to be living in Singapore.” - Rene Ng Juyi, 3rd year student from NTU Hall 6.

“Leadership, organization, teamwork; it is always difficult to organize activities for 25 participants; not to say the need to uphold NUS and sponsor's reputation; in real life situation, many times such skills are needed to complete the job.” - Loh Yi Xuan, 1st year student from NUS CHESS.

“To see things from another perspective and discover how i can contribute to the society other than what I already know.” - Zhao YingJie, 3rd year student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

“Learnt the importance of community building from the bottom up. The members of the community must initiate change. We will utilize this approach when we control sports clinics for Down Syndrome Association of Singapore back home.” - David Aaron Chan Tze Ming, 2nd year student from NTU Hall 6.

## 5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

### 6.1. Conclusion

Through our research, ISL is proven to have the great impact on the student's development, in term of skills, awareness, social responsibilities and level of happiness.

Reflection is one of the crucial components regarding to SL, and ISL projects as well. Hence, the group with experienced teachers has improved themselves more than the groups without teachers. Therefore, the schools/ institutes should provide comprehensive training for teachers/faculty staff so that they can lead the learning well during the ISL.

### 6.2. The contribution of research

This research on the effects of ISL on students' social awareness, skill enhancement, attitude and level of happiness was conducted in Tra Vinh province, Vietnam with 193 Singaporean students. This is the primary research conducted by ECO Vietnam Group in Vietnam. In the early period of Service Learning development, as there is a scarce resource on this aspect, this research is a contribution to Service Learning documents in Vietnam and over the world. Research is done by NGOs to give the different views for ISL's impact. We also aware that it is too soon to have the conclusion for our hypothesis but the results have built the foundation for us to carry deeper research on these topics, especially for the role of teachers/lecturers in the ISL program.

**Keywords:** International Service Learning, skill development, social awareness, level of happiness, importance of teacher.

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**Biographical sketch of presenters**

**Presenter 1: Harry, Van Anh Pham**

- Founder – President of ECO Vietnam Group – Vietnam
- Short biography:

Harry is currently the president of EVG. He received ASEAN Scholarship to study Engineering in Nanyang Technological University. He performed exceptionally well in university and graduated with the First Class of Honour Degree. In 2016, he studied Master in Public Administration at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. He has founded EVG with the passion to educate and nurture young people to be responsible citizen and empathetic human being.

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**Presenter 2: My Ngoc Chau**

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- Short biography:

Ngoc is the operation staff of EVG. She studied Social Work at University of Human Sciences and Humanities – Vietnam National University. In 2018, she graduated as the valedictorian of the Social Work Faculty. She started to work at EVG since she was a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student. After graduating, she has worked at EVG where she believes that she and her colleagues can contribute to communities in Vietnam by sustainable ways.

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