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## **Impact of Community Service on the Communication skills of Business Graduates**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** *This research aims to investigate the impact of community service on the communication skills of business graduates. Community service involves voluntary work aimed at assisting people in specific situations. The study focuses on business students with prior community service experience from a private sector business school. Engaging in community service not only improved communication skills but also fostered interpersonal development, enhancing social, ethical, and productivity attributes, making graduates more competent for potential employment*

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393

portunities.

**Methodology:** The research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing self-administered questionnaires to collect data from capturing perspectives from both students and organizations. Close-ended questions facilitated data analysis. Questionnaire 1 targeted 100 respondents, while Questionnaire 2 targeted 50. Data analysis focused on identifying the impact of community service on communication skills enhancement among business graduates.

business students with prior community service experience. Two questionnaires were designed based on literature review findings,

**Results/Findings:** Analysis of the collected data revealed a significant positive impact of community service on the communication skills of business graduates. Both questionnaires indicated that engagement in community service led to enhanced communication skills, interpersonal development, and increased social, ethical, and productivity attributes among graduates.

**Future Direction:** Future research could explore the long-term effects of community service on the career trajectories and success of business graduates. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which community service influences communication skills development and overall professional competencies among graduates. Furthermore, comparative studies across different educational institutions and industries could offer broader perspectives on the role of community service in enhancing graduate employability and workplace readiness.

Keywords: *Community service, Communication skills, Business graduates.*

## Introduction

Interpersonal communication has become an essential need for all graduates across all disciplines. Prospective employers deem interpersonal

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Its as a defining skill that graduates require not only to get recruited, but also to maintain their job performance. Business schools and teachers employ various methods to inbuilt these skills in their graduates. Among various methods that are implemented in teaching of business communication to inculcate interpersonal skills in students, community service allows students to bring their theoretical understanding into practice through experiential learning. De Tocqueville first recorded observation of service activities in America and he called these acts "habits of the heart" (Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023; Bellah et al., 1986). Since then, business schools have ensured integrating community service in their curriculum (Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021).

Theoretical learning and knowledge construct students' concepts of communication skills that they need to excel in their professional lives. However, it is equally important for students to practice their understanding and concepts in real situations with diversified workgroups. Community service allows students to communicate and apply their interpersonal skills to practical challenges that they otherwise might not be able to get exposed to. Communication is inherently process-based; therefore, students must realize that participating in a process-oriented activity will improve their understanding and application of interpersonal communication skills.

Humans are social animals. Collectively, they construct a society. In order to make the society functional, they collaborate and depend on each other. It is this need that cannot be replaced by technology and virtual societies. People need aesthetic, humane, interpersonal and teambuilding skills to ensure that the society they are part of operates successfully. Community service will encourage students to develop, deepen and practice these skills successfully which can greatly help them in all phases of life. For both personal and professional lives, students require strong interpersonal skills. According to Merderer (2011), those who possess great

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Communication skills will always be able to handle situations better than those who do not (Ahmad, Rashid, & Ali, 2023).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to gauge the impact of community service on the communication skills of business graduates. It also aims to determine if prospective employers consider that the graduates with community service experience possess better communications skills and they perform better on job. It also highlights the significance of community service experience as a tool to improve students' communication skills. Moreover, it focusses on skills like building rapport, interviewing, effective listening, developing and sustaining interpersonal relationships.

### **Methods of Investigation**

The study was conducted in quantitative paradigm. Close ended questionnaires were used as data collection tools. The first questionnaire targeted a sample of 100 business graduates, who were engaged in community service. The second questionnaire which is from the organizations' perspective had a sample size of 50 respondents, who provided an insight on how they view these business graduates as future prospects for their organizations.

### **Scope**

The study is confined to the analysis of the impact of community service on business graduates' confidence, ability to communicate, expression, interpersonal growth, mindfulness, rapport building and team building skills.

### **Research Questions**

- i. Does community service have a positive impact on the communication skills of the business graduates of a private sector business school?
- ii. Do prospective employers consider that the graduates with community service experience possess both better communications skills and

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etter ability of job performance?

### Literature review

Substantial literature is available on the need for community service in order to enhance communication skills. Effective communication skills are essential for every job. Employees communicate with clients to gain information, convey essential information and make important commitments.

According to Tucker and McCarthy (2001), community service helps improve students' communication skills. They conducted surveys which included 127 undergraduate business students. The results were derived by a pre-test questionnaire which included 57 students at the starting of the semester and at the end of the semester 127 students completed the post questionnaire. The first hypothesis tested whether students, who take part in community service activities, possess better presentation skills than students, who do not take part in community service activities. Partaking in community service activities was correlated with post-test self-productivity levels, to assess if it had a substantial effect on students' presentation skills. The study supported the execution of community service activities for improving and strengthening students' presentation skills (Phulpoto, Oad & Imran, 2024).

Addams and Woodbury (2010) stated that during economic downfall, NGO's received fewer donations. Students were asked to convince for-profit companies to provide resources for an NGO. Within 2 years, 150 students raised over \$27,000 in cash, goods, or services, which enabled the NGO to provide continued services. The students not only enriched their interpersonal skills, but also assisted the NGO.

The findings of Gallini and Moely (2003) state that students who were engaged in the community service evaluated their experience more positively than non-service learners and they scored significantly higher on community engagement, academic engagement, interpersonal engagement,

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an non-service learners.

Most remarkably, in Astin et al (2000) sub study of 433 students, 82.8% reported that community service activities improved their communication skills, and (79.9%) participants reported it facilitated them to provide a better quality service. In a recent study conducted from a representative sample of 369 students, 64% respondents stated community service had an affirmative effect on their communication skills, 25% considered the impact was very strong, while only 3.5% stated that the impact was negative, with the rest neutral. This, therefore, illustrates the importance of adopting community service-learning to be beneficial to a student's communication skills development (Duffy et al., 2008).

Conway, Amel, and Gerwien (2009) conducted a research of 103 different samples of community service learning studies between 1968 and 2006 and reported the importance of enhancing communication skills through structured reflections in classes. They explored when students are given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, the impact on their learning outcomes is even greater (Imran & Akhtar, 2023).

In another recent survey by Maderer (2011), he states that one of the great things about volunteer work is that it usually involves dealing with people and many of those people tend to practice "Old School" communication methods. Although technology can be a great asset in the regulation and supervision of community service programs, it fails to replace the face to face efforts of the volunteers that get the job done. Community service will ensure more effective development, enhancement and usage of communication skills among learners, which will assist them in all the personal and professional domains of life.

In the end, community service does provide positive experience by making the students more ethically and socially responsible. Overall, it influences the development of students' interpersonal skills and enhances

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eir communication skills (Llenares & Espanola, 2015).

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

It was a small scale exploratory research that was conducted to explore if community service improves communication skills of business graduates. For this, a quantitative survey was designed consisting of two questionnaires. The first questionnaire aimed at business graduates while the second was for organizations in order to gain insight on how they view the impact of community service on the potential employees.

### **Sample and data collection**

For the purpose of this study, the sample size for the first questionnaire consisted of students who were currently studying in business programs at a private sector business school in Karachi. Sample included students from age bracket of eighteen to twenty-five years. These students had exposure to community service. Out of all the students, 100 students were randomly selected. For the second questionnaire, the sample size consisted of 50 professionals from various organizations to know their perspective on the research topic. This was done through the similar approach of random selection. Thompson (2012) has highlighted the significance of simple random sampling, all elements of population are equally important; thus the sample size has a fair representation of the actual population.

### **Instrument**

The data were collected using two sets of questionnaires. The first set of self-administered questionnaires were distributed to one hundred undergraduate students of a reputable private sector business school. The questionnaire consisted of ten polar questions. The first two questions were regarding the demographic information of the respondents that inquired about their age and gender; the third question inquired if community service

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proves students' confidence, the fourth question looked into the impact of community service on students' ability to communicate; the fifth question asked whether community service makes students more expressive, the sixth question inquired if community service facilitates students' interpersonal growth; the seventh question investigated whether community service improves students' mindfulness, the eighth question inquired if community service assist students in building rapport; the ninth question sought if community service enhances students' team building skills, and the tenth question asked if students would recommend their friends to participate in community service activities.

The second set of questionnaire was filled in online by fifty respondents. These respondents were professionals from various organizations and they offered organizations' perspective. The questionnaire consisted of five questions. The first question inquired if prospective employers believe that students with community service background possess more experience; the second question explored if prospective employers believe that communication skills of students with community service background are better, the third question inquired if prospective employers believe that students with community service background are more expressive; the fourth question investigated prospective employers believe that students with community service background have more positive attitude, and the fifth question asked if prospective employers believe that students with community service background have better prospect for future careers.

## **Results and discussion**

The research was conducted with the help of two questionnaires, one questionnaire from the students' perspective and the other from the organizations' perspective. Both the questionnaires focused upon investigating whether community service improves the communication skills of business students.

### **Questionnaire results**

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### Questionnaire 1

This section of the study presents the results and analysis of the data collected. The results of these questionnaires were interpreted and conclusions were drawn. Table 1 shows the percentage responses given by the undergraduate students regarding their age brackets.

**Table 1**

Percentage response given by the undergraduate students regarding age brackets

Question	N	%age response	%age response	%age response
		'18-20'	'21-23'	'24-25'
What is your age?	100	46	42	12

Table 1 shows the percentage responses to the first question regarding the age bracket of undergraduate students, who are currently studying at business schools or have graduated with business degrees as well as having an exposure to community service. According to table 1, 46% students were between the age of 18 to 20, 42% students were between age of 21 to 23, and only 12% students were between the age of 24 to 25.

**Table 2**

Percentage response given by the undergraduate students regarding gender

Question	N	%age response	%age response
		'Male'	'Female'
What is your gender?	100	37	63

Table 2 shows the percentage responses to the second question regarding the gender of the respondents. According to table 2, 37% respondents were males and 63% respondents were females.

**Table 3**

Percentage response given by the undergraduate students

Questions	N	%age response 'Yes'	%age response 'No'
Does community service improve students' confidence?	100	96	4
Does community service help improve students' ability to communicate?	100	94	6
Does community service make students more expressive?	100	97	3
Does community service facilitate students' interpersonal growth?	100	96	4
Does community service improve students' mindfulness?	100	91	9
Does community service help students build rapport?	100	88	12
Does community service enhance students' team building skills?	100	93	7
Would you recommend your friends to participate in community service activities?	100	98	2

The third question highlighted the concern whether the students believed participating in community service improve their confidence. 96% respondents believed community service helped improve their confidence. Only 4% respondents believed community service had a neutral impact on

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em. Rubin et al (1997) state that they expect students, who partake in the community activity projects, have better presentation skills than students, who are provided only classroom instruction and presentation practice.

The fourth question investigated whether community service is a good way to improve the ability to communicate. 94% students agreed to the fact that community service was a good way to improve their ability to communicate with others. Only 6% students remained neutral to the fact that community service was a good way to improve their ability to communicate. According to Tucker et al (1998), Community service offers students an opportunity to communicate with diverse populations of varied age groups, which enables them to put theories of intercultural communication into practice.

The fifth question looked into whether community service allows individuals to be more expressive. The table shows that 97% of the respondents believed community service allows them to be more expressive as individuals while only 3% showed neutrality towards the question. According to Waterman (1997), by participating in community service, students strengthen their learning of traditional curriculum, experience personal growth, become more expressive, develop civic responsibility, and contribute to the community.

The sixth question highlighted the need for community service to promote interpersonal growth. 96% of the students agreed community service allows them to personally grow as individuals while 4% of the students believed community service had a neutral impact. Simonet (2008) asserts that 'integrating academics and community service delivers greater student leadership development, enriched learning, and improved academic performance' (p.1). According to him, this fusion can enhance 'student retention to make visible new ideas; create stronger, more seamless institutional practices; embed effective practices of civic engagement; and

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ablish new, positive relationships among different departments of higher education' (p.1).

The seventh question inquired whether community service improves students' sense of mindfulness. 91% of the students agreed community service make them more mindful while 9% remained neutral towards the question. Dewey contended that if students could apply their learning within the community, they would not only develop themselves on a personal level, but also contribute to their communities as citizens (VanWynsberghe & Andruske, 2007). Gomez (1999) also asserts that service-learning participants, in comparison with other students, develop skills such as an ability to express opinion, to speak in public, to organize groups, and to think critically about political issues (Gomez, 1999).

The eighth question investigated whether community service helps students build rapport. Most respondents believed community service did help in building rapport while 12% of the respondents did not agree that community service helps build rapport. Tucker et al (1998) assert that students not only learn the importance of networking through dealing with team and community members, but also begin to build their own networks with the contacts they make through these projects.

The ninth question explored whether participating in community service help students enhance their team building skills. 93% students responded positively to this question and only 7% students responded negatively. Dobbs-Oates (n.d.) in her poster presentation, that describes the use of reflection in a service-learning project, states that 'students reporting effective teamwork reflected that they were surprised by the way students so seemingly different from one another could work together so effectively. The close teamwork required by this project seemed to break down the pre-conceptions students may have held about one another'.

The tenth question discussed whether the respondents would

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commend and suggest their friends to participate in community service activities. 98% of the students agreed to suggest community service activities to their friends while only 2% went against advising their friends to participate in voluntary work.

### Overall analysis

The overall results of the data analysis focused on the belief that community service does indeed provide aid for the students to improve their confidence and ability to communicate. There was a consensus amongst the students concerning the fact that community service helped build relationships. Community service also allowed students to be more expressive as individuals and made them more mindful. Also, students believed that their communication skills improved through voluntary activities as it provided them with a platform to convey their message to others. Team building skills were also improved. In short, the results provide a positive attitude of the students concerning the need for community service to improve communication skills.

### Questionnaire 2

The second questionnaire was from the organizations' perspective. The questionnaire had five polar questions which were completed by 50 respondents.

### Table 4

Percentage responses given by prospective employers

Questions	N	%age responses 'Yes'	%age responses 'No'
Do you believe that students with community service background possess more experience?	50	88.5	11.5

Do you believe that students with community service background possess better communication skills?	50	92.3	7.7
Do you believe that students with community service background are more expressive?	50	84.6	15.4
Do you believe that students with community service background have more positive attitude?	50	84.6	15.5
Do you believe that students with community service background have better prospect for future careers?	50	82.7	7.3

The first question inquired whether the organizations believe those students with community service background are more experienced than others. Most of the respondents (88.5%) believed that those students having a background of community service did have more experience than those having no such background. 11.5% disagreed to the belief that community service helped students have a greater experience.

The second question investigated if organizations' believe that student's with community service background have better communication skills. The results showed that 92.3% respondents had seen improvements in a students' communication skills while 7.7% of the respondents believed the communication skills of the students remained neutral.

The third question focused on whether the organizations believe community service makes students more expressive. 84.6% respondents believed that community service exposure made students more expressive. 15.4% of the respondents disagreed to the fact that community service provided students with an opportunity to improve their expression.

The fourth question aimed to highlight whether organizations believed

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Community service is one of the factors resulting in positive attitude towards one another. 84.6% respondents believed that community service promoted positive attitude amongst the students while 15.4% did not agree to the fact stating community service helps in developing positive attitude within the students.

The fifth and the last question, the last question, asked organizations if students with community service have better prospects for future career growth. 82.7% respondents viewed students availing community service as a positive step towards their future career growth while 17.3% respondents disagreed that students availing community service have better chances of a more prosperous future.

### **Overall analysis**

The overall analysis of the results provides us with an insight of the organizations' point of view. The data focused on the fact that organizations do favor community service as a way for students to improve their communication skills. Organizations not only believed community service was a way of improving communication skills but also saw students with the opportunity to enhance their future career options. To summarize the data, it can be said that community service has proven to be an essential tool in the lives of the students.

### **Conclusion**

The overall analysis of both questionnaire proves that community service have a positive impact on the communication skills of the business graduates. The involvement in community service not only plays an essential role in improving the communication skills but also helps to develop a student interpersonally, makes him/her more social, ethical and productive. This holistically develops the communication skills and builds confidence amongst the business graduates' making them more capable for a potential job. It prepares the students and makes them socially aware of the en

vironment all together. The result of the studies reported herein clearly indicates that community service develops the person, advances the interests of society, and bridges cultural differences. It helps the graduates in their careers and the work of business by improving their communication and writing skills all together.

Overall, community service is a positive experience for students increasing their confidence in themselves and their ability to work with others; Students learnt much from their community service experience. These skills cannot always be measured and the students may not even be aware of their learning. By establishing community service and academic service learning as part of academic curriculum can help in the development of students' skill set; personally and professionally.

### **Recommendations**

Life of a business graduate student involves communication at every aspect whether at meetings, report writing, research or business mingling functions. Thus it is right to say that communication and business go hand in hand. Therefore, this study recommends that community service should be incorporated in University life in order to make students skilled at communication. This could be done by making a course regarding community service compulsory for all business fields so that it not only increases awareness amongst the students but also make them more powerful at communicating. Also, voluntary work should be done within the universities by collaborating with different trusts or schools and having students to interact with them as it will not only be good for their communication skills but also, it will make them responsible towards the society. Sessions should be conducted every now and then in order to make students know the positive side of volunteer work. Thus, community service is helpful to enhance communication skills in students in various ways which include knowing people from different backgrounds and how to interact with

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em and have a positive impact on them. It could be helpful for them in their later life as business environment is a vast world and it is important to have an edge at communication skills. It would help the students to have strength to convince and persuade their potential customers in their business or work environment. Therefore, the business graduates should involve themselves in community service to not only have a better business life but also to develop themselves interpersonally.

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