

ENLIVENING SPIRITUAL VALUES THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH: A SERVICE-LEARNING APPROACH

Shashika N. Herath¹, Indujeeva K. Peiris², Ksenija Napan³, Rohana Ulluwishewa⁴

Sustainable development in any country requires professionals to be equipped with technical knowledge, skills, and an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between living beings and nature. Currently, most Sri Lankan universities focus primarily on imparting technical knowledge and skills to students but ignore the significance of enlivening spiritual values that provide a robust grounding for sustainable behavior. Thus, engendering graduates rich in technical know-how but poor in spiritual values. This eventually leads to a society that lacks moral values, long-term vision, sustainable governance, empathy, acceptance and accountability. This paper uses Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methodology and Service Learning pedagogy to understand the reciprocal impact of academic learning and service experience in enlivening spiritual values among undergraduate students. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a collaborative research approach that involves all stakeholders in the research process. It aims to combine knowledge with action in order to achieve social change and improve the health and well-being of community members. In our research, we focused on creating a lasting internal change (self-transformation) that will manifest positively in the external environment. The research context involved 15 undergraduate students at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in Sri Lanka. The research participants went through a selection process, underwent a series of workshops and webinars and took part in a seven-day community-based project in Talawa. Their experiences were captured using daily reflections, observations and interviews. The collected data was organized as narratives and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings strongly supported that participant experienced life-changing realizations in the form of: increased self-confidence, reduction of social anxiety, increased empathy towards others, appreciation of life beyond oneself and seeing the danger of self-centered behavior. In summary, the research participants acknowledged that spiritual development is something vital to well-being and that it goes beyond knowledge, culture, language, rituals and religious beliefs. Future studies could use longitudinal research to validate the lasting impact of short-term exposure to experiential learning that exhibits self-transformation behavior.

Keywords: Spiritual Development, Undergraduates, Service Learning, Community-Based Participatory Research

¹ University of Sri Jayewardenepura. shashika@sjp.ac.lk