

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A VIRTUAL INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT ON STUDENTS' AGEISM ATTITUDE TOWARDS SENIORS AND ON SENIORS' SOCIAL COMPETENCE

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BACKGROUND

- As people age, they may have fewer social interactions due to several factors such as decreased mobility, living alone due to loss of spouse and children living out of the senior's neighborhood.
- Lack of social interaction may negatively affect social competence.

OBJECTIVE

To assess the effectiveness of an intergenerational virtual service-learning project on ageism attitude among college students and on seniors' social competence.

STUDY DESIGN

Design

- Pre-post design-SPRING 2021 survey data.
- Random assignment of undergraduate students enrolled in a course with special focus on cultural competence.

Sample

- Service-learning (SL) students (n= 21)
- Non-service-learning (non-SL) students (n=40)
- Senior adults (n=21)

Service-Learning (SL) Students

- Students asked to have a virtual conversation with senior partners for at least 30 minutes a week for a total of 8 weeks.
- Students required to write a one-half-page reflection after each virtual meeting.
- Students required to write a one-page reflection after four virtual meetings.

Non-Service-Learning (Non-SL) Students

- Students asked to write a 5-page paper on ageism in different countries.

Pre and Post Surveys

- **All students** asked to fill out pre and post surveys (ONLINE): *Aging Semantic Differential Scale, Ageism, Carey Ageism Scale, and two-item, researcher-generated Likert rating to measure student comfort and confidence interacting with seniors.*
- **All seniors** asked to fill out pre and post surveys (PAPER-BASED): *Aging Semantic Differential Scale and Texas Social Behavioral Inventory to measure Social Competence.*

RESULTS

Pretest and Posttest Service-Learning Students vs. Non-Service-Learning Students

	Group	Pretest (n)	Posttest (n)	Pretest Mean	Pretest P-value	Posttest Mean	Posttest P-value
Aging Differential Scaling	Non-SL	32	20	115.88	NS	113.6	p=0.05
	SL	20	13	121.05		98.38	
Ageism Scale	Non-SL	32	20	42.00	NS	37.7	NS
	SL	20	13	44.75		36.77	
Two-Item Competency	Non-SL	32	20	17.06	NS	17.25	NS
	SL	20	13	16.40		16.15	

Pretest and Posttest Seniors' Social Competence and Self-Esteem n=21

Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	P-value
50.81	52.20	NS

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

- Both SL and non-SL students showed a decrease in their Ageing Differential Scale scores from pre to posttest, but the scores for SL students were significantly lower at the posttest than those for the non-service-learning group, $t(1,31) = 2.041, p=0.05$.
- Scores on the ageism scale decreased from pre to posttest for both SL and non-SL students but were not significantly different from each other on either the pretest or posttest survey.
- Interacting with seniors and completing the more traditional research paper on ageism decreased students' ageism score (service-learning students, for example, showed a decrease in those scores from 44.75 at the pretest to 36.77 at the posttest) with both groups showing a comparable decrease.
- Seniors' social competence and self-esteem level increased after interaction with college students, but the increase was non-significant.

CONCLUSION

- Virtual intergenerational SL significantly reduced student's ageism attitudes towards seniors as measured by the aging differential scale.
- Virtual intergenerational SL may be an effective tool to decrease younger individuals' ageism attitude towards seniors.
- Virtual intergenerational SL increased seniors' social competence and self-esteem level, although insignificant.

LIMITATIONS

- COVID-19 pandemic prevented students from having a face-to-face interaction with senior partners.
- Study was done within 8 weeks. Results may have been more robust and significant if the study was done in a longer period of time.
- Study results are not generalizable since sample of students are from Texas State BHA program and seniors are from San Marcos, TX. However, study design is replicable.
- Number of students completing the posttest survey was fewer than the pretest survey.

IRB approval

Study was approved by Texas State IRB # 7046

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