

The Visakha Life Sciences and Entrepreneurship (VLSE) symposium, a pilot project with huge success.

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Figure 1. Flyers of VLSE symposia from 2021 to 2025.

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Research in Life Sciences is often overlooked at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels of education in most of the colleges. This was an observation based on more than 100 institutions including state universities, private institutes and colleges in India. Lack of research skills and practical laboratory skills pose tough challenges in the process of climbing the career ladder. While the provision of skill-based training is critical, the existence of a platform where the trainees can show off their skills and/or achievements is equally important because if the achievements are not publicly discussed then the trainee may not understand the real world challenges and expectations. With thousands of doctoral degree holders competing for grants and funds, the trainees with no experience and without a doctoral degree will stand no chance to survive the real world jobs.

The Center for Advanced-Applied Biological Sciences & Entrepreneurship (TCABS-E) Laboratories [1] was started in 2019 in the city of Rajamahendravaram, A.P. India with a goal to provide state-of-the-art and hands-on laboratory skills in the field of Life Sciences consisting of both basics and advanced topics. The first batch of skilled trainees were ready to show off their skills by the end of the year 2019.

The first annual biotechnology festival of Rajahmundry (ABFR) was organized in December 2019 to provide a platform for the skilled trainees where they competitively showed off their skills through oral and poster presentations [2]. Unfortunately due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the successive second ABFR [3] was organized online due to the curfew. Although the second ABFR was organized online, several students participated and gave oral presentations that were conducted through Google Meet.

The post pandemic period has completely changed the laboratory perspective for most of the students. However, it was noticed that curious students still existed waiting for the end of COVID curfews. TCABS-E Laboratories started a branch in Visakhapatnam, with a goal to provide skill training and a platform to showcase the skills of the trainees. The response from the students was beyond the expectations and there was a flood of students that came to TCABS-E Laboratories in Visakhapatnam for laboratory skill training in the year 2020. In order to provide a platform to showcase their skills for these trainees in Visakhapatnam, the first Visakha Life Sciences and Entrepreneurship (VLSE) Symposium was organized in the year 2021 [4]. In the first VLSE Symposium hundreds of trainees from TCABS-E

Laboratories and other institutions participated and competed with each other in the oral and poster presentations [5].

Ever since the first VLSE Symposium, it was annually continued providing a platform for trained students to showcase their skills (Figure 1). Each year, the emphasis on Entrepreneurship in Life Sciences increased resulting in pitch meetings attracting some local investors. Renowned scientists who attended the VLSE Symposia in the past five years always connected with the trainees for various purposes such as research collaborations, higher education, jobs, etc. Based on the results from the past five years it is noteworthy that several skilled trainees started their exciting careers due to the exposure to the real world challenges.

Typically many institutions encourage their students to participate in oral and poster presentation competitions without their own data i.e., literature-based presentations. However, the VLSE Symposia primarily emphasized on presentations containing original data from the real time experiments performed by the skilled trainees. Hence the initial VLSE Symposia were packed with research intense presentations. In the recent years 2024 and 2025, the number of literature-based presentations increased. This increase was because of high school students who may or may not have the privilege to perform state-of-the-art research. Undergraduates, postgraduates and research scholars were highly discouraged from literature-based presentations. Overall, the pilot project, VLSE Symposium has created a platform for skilled trainees, high school students, scientists and entrepreneurs resulting in new research collaborations, jobs, higher studies, etc. Hence it is considered a success.

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