

Life Skills Education and Young Adolescents: The Indian Scenario

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Abstract

Life Skills are the psychosocial abilities which equip individuals to make informed choices, manage emotional well-being and social relationships as well as make the best use of their potential. Life Skills Education leads to positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Young adolescents require Life Skills education because adolescence is a transition period that bridges childhood and adulthood and during which major physical, cognitive and psychological changes occur which need to be addressed. Though Life Skills training has always been present in the Indian education system since ages but in the 21st century, National Curriculum Framework (NCF), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and very recently National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has put thrust upon it. The present study seeks to explore the Life Skills programmes initiatives in India in the 21st century.

Keywords: Life Skills, Life Skills Education, National Curriculum Framework (NCF), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

INTRODUCTION

Life Skills are essentially those abilities that help to promote mental well-being and competence among young people as they face the realities of life. Life Skills are defined as ‘the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life’ (World Health Organization, 1999). United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) defines life skills as ‘a behaviour

change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills’.

Young adolescents require Life Skills as adolescence is a period of rapid development when young people acquire new capacities, knowledge and are confronted with unique challenges. This is also the period when individuals try to establish their identity. During this critical period, Life Skills Education should be imparted because Life Skills include competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, ability to organise, social and communication skills, adaptability, problem solving, ability to cooperate that are needed for actively shaping a peaceful future. In the contemporary world, there is a growing demand of Life Skill Education as it aids the adolescents translate knowledge, attitudes and values into healthy behaviour. Life Skills determine psychosocial competence and self-esteem. With life skills, an individual is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises.

UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO enlisted ten core life skill strategies and techniques as Life Skills: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Life Skills have been identified as an essential resource for developing psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and resilience skills to negotiate every day challenges and productive involvement in the community.

UNESCO has divided the components under three broad heads-

Self-awareness	Interpersonal Skills	Thinking Skills
1. Stress management	5. Empathy	11. Goal setting
2. Emotional regulation	6. Listening skills	12. Decision making
3. Positive thinking	7. Interpersonal effectiveness	13. Problem solving
4. Self-esteem	8. Handling disputes	14. Critical and creative thinking
	9. Managing relation- ships	15. Executive function skills
	10. Confident communication	16. Resilience (bouncing back from adversity)

Thus, Life Skills, in a general way, can be termed as a mix of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Life Skills are the psychosocial abilities which equip individuals to make informed choices, manage emotional well-being and social relationships as well as make the best use of their

potential. Life Skills Education is a holistic approach which nurtures the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills which are age specific, culturally relevant and based on the developmental tasks of an individual during a life span (Nair & Ranjan, 2020). Nair & Ranjan (2020) emphasized that the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi highlighted the importance of Life Skills teaching. According to, Swami Vivekananda education means character building and man-making.

Life Skills Education leads to positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Vranda & Rao, 2011). Life Skill Education promotes psychosocial competence and helps students to cope with the challenges of life by behaviour modification (Razia, 2016). Life Skills approach is an interactive educational methodology that focuses on learner centred, youth-friendly, gender sensitive, interactive and participatory learning (Rooth, 2000). Saravanakumar (2020) stressed that social skills curricula can improve self-management and self-control skills, thereby improving learning skills, school adjustment and academic performance.

Life skills can be divided into the following categories (Hopson and Scally, 1986) as referred in Vranda & Rao, 2011) namely, learning/academic skills (i.e., study skills, literacy, learning from experiences etc.), relating Skills (i.e., communication, making, keeping and ending relationships, assertiveness, conflict management, etc.), working and playing skills (i.e., time management, money management, career planning etc.) and developing self and other skills (i.e., creative problem solving, being positive about oneself, decision making, stress management, transition management, managing negative emotions, self-awareness, maintaining physical well-being. These skills are known to be key contributors to negotiating and mediating challenges that young people face in becoming productive citizens (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017; WHO, 1993).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research work are as follows-

- i. To analyse the necessity of Life Skills Education.
- ii. To explore different Life Skills programmes initiatives in India.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative in nature and has been conducted with the help of journals, articles, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, NEP 2020, preliminary draft of NCF etc. Descriptive analytic method has been used for the study.

WHY LIFE SKILLS ?

Adolescence is a transition period that bridges childhood and adulthood and during which major physical, cognitive and psychological changes occur which need to be addressed (Vranda & Rao, 2011). With the knowledge of Life Skills, the young adults have informed and healthy choices about their day-to-day life challenges and issues. The main goal of Life Skills Education is to develop positive and adaptive behaviour by supporting individuals to practice and cultivate psychosocial skills that can reduce risk and capitalize on constructive behaviour.

The contemporary society is facing a number of challenges like unemployment, growing inequality, poverty, violence and war, environmental degradation etc. The adolescents today are growing up in a society which is filled with sex, drug use, alcohol and adolescent pregnancy STDs, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse etc. This very insistent difficult situation caused by these problems demands the mobilisation of the skills, abilities and the creative-problem solving potential of the entire population. The importance of skills with broader spectrum of development of *personal potential* becomes significant when the future is uncertain. Life Skills Education empowers the adolescents' career planning, decision making, health planning and forming positive relationships. The four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together and The International Bureau of Education (IBE) derives its definition of Life Skills from the four pillars. It defined life skills as the basis of personal management and the required social skills which are necessary for optimum functioning independently.

Life Skills are developed as a milieu of individual and social experiences, impressions, encounters and information. Life Skills are not static skills, but evolve according to circumstances and experiences. Life Skills depend also upon the family milieu and upon gender difference. Life Skills need to be adapted to the specific contexts of each country, each group or even each individual. Life Skills education is very much important in the contemporary

world because it does not entail mere gathering of knowledge and change in attitude but the deviations in thinking process followed by systematic modification of behaviour.

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMES INITIATIVES IN INDIA

Life Skills have become a major part of many intervention programs around the globe. Life Skills programmes have been implemented via multiple focal areas such as sports settings, risky behaviours and sexual and reproductive health. Here, the Life Skills Programmes Initiatives in India have been elaborately conversed chronologically.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has emphasised on constructive learning experiences and on the development of an inquiry-based approach, work-related knowledge and broader Life Skills. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2005 introduced Life Skills Education as an integral part of the curricula through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes 6 to 10 and has developed Life Skills manuals for teachers teaching classes 6, 7 and 8. These manuals provide teachers broad guidelines for each of the ten core Life Skills identified by WHO. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also has, under its agenda, Life Skills training focusing on upper primary girls.

ADOLESCENCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME (2005)

Adolescents constitute the indispensable demographic force of a country. They are the agents of change in the society. They are a resource to be nurtured and trained so that they can become productive citizens and leaders of tomorrow. Adolescents are at risk because often young people know very little about the process of growing up, the risks of substance abuse or sexually transmitted diseases. They lack the social support to seek accurate information and services. Many social factors like early marriage, early pregnancy, high maternal mortality rate, domestic violence and deprivation of educational benefits, compound the vulnerability of girls and young women. Informed and skilled adolescents are likely to make better decisions concerning their careers, relationships, habits and physical and mental health. Life Skills Education is a process to develop positive values in the youth. It would aid today's youth under stress to have a smooth transition into adulthood. When adolescents acquire Knowledge, Attitudes, Values Enhanced and Life Skills (KAVELS), they benefit in a variety of ways. These Life Skills help adolescents to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and

creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

Adolescence Education Programme (AEP, 2005) is a joint initiative by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to equip every adolescent (child between 10-19 years) with scientific information, knowledge and Life Skills to make them aware regarding adolescent reproductive and sexual health, substance abuse, violence, mental illnesses and loss of productivity and to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV infection etc. Under this programme, teachers and peer educators are trained, who, in turn, conduct the programme amongst the student community. AEP is an umbrella programme to cover all the secondary and senior secondary schools of the country. Presently it is being proposed for transaction by nodal teachers in classes 9th and 11th for minimum of 16 hours in an academic year. The methodology adapted for AEP is interactive, participatory and based on Life Skills.

The objectives of AEP were – i. to develop value enhanced Life Skills for coping and managing concerns of Adolescence through Co-Curricular Activities (CCA), ii. to provide accurate knowledge to learners about the process of growing up, substance abuse and different types of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, iii. to develop healthy attitudes and responsible behaviour towards process of growing up and to enable them to deal with gender stereotypes and prejudices.

OTHER INITIATIVES BY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) being the coordinating agency adopted a co-curricular approach in Life Skills Education and worked through the three National School Systems – CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), NVS (Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti), and KVS (Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan). Broadly Life Skills Education is being conducted in two ways; viz., Life Skills as part of curriculum with grades and without grades.

Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has introduced post-graduate programmes in Life Skills Education in 2008 and developed training manual to train adolescents and youth in Life Skills. A series of

trainers' training programmes were organised by RGNIYD and has popularised life skills programme across the country.

Government of India has introduced the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) in 2013. The NSQF has given a new focus on the skill training and its components. Professional knowledge, professional skills, core skills and attitude has been given thrust in all the training and educational programmes in India. It has mandated the thrust on Life Skills programmes in the training and academic curricula in all educational streams. A new Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was created and new skill development and entrepreneurship development policy (2016) was released. Skilling India project was launched in mission mode and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and Sector Skill Councils in PPP mode were initiated. In all the training programmes, life skills components have been incorporated.

LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION: FACILITATORS' GUIDE (2014)

The department of Psychiatry, NIMHANS Bangalore, developed a facilitators' guide for Life Skills Education of the adolescents in 2014. The facilitators' guide focused on Indian adolescents and their problems like addressing nutrition and communicable diseases, addressing substance abuse e.g. tobacco and alcohol in India, addressing addiction behaviour like mobile, video game, cyber chat and porn addiction, addressing sexuality like early marriage in adolescent girls, sexual abuse etc., addressing gender issues like women harassment, sex selection in pregnancy etc., addressing choices - professional, vocational, marriage etc., addressing aggression like bullying, communal riots and violence. The handbook elaborately explained a facilitator's role and the methods of teaching-learning like participatory method and peer group learning, management of mental disorders, fundamentals and methods of counselling etc.

INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Life Skills as part of curriculum in all the undergraduate programmes from 2019. As per the Quality Mandate of UGC, it has taken initiatives for providing Life Skills (including soft skills) to students enrolled in institutions of higher education especially at under-graduate level. According to UGC, Life Skills play an

important role in increasing the employability as well as self-esteem of the students. These may include communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management, team work, flexibility, problem solving, professional skills, decision making skills, leadership abilities and universal values among others.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (2021)

As per the recommendations of NEP 2020, the preliminary draft of National Curriculum Framework (NCF) has been prepared by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). NCF (2021) proposes the study of 'Individuals in Society' from grade IX. The subject covers four domains namely socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental domains. This kind of content allows greater scope for ethical and moral reasoning. This subject is part of interdisciplinary area as it concerns ethical and moral reasoning in the context of socio-cultural, economic and political issues and requires the application of understanding gained from multiple subjects. Thus, the content matter of this subject helps to develop interpersonal and thinking skills among the students. This particular subject provides the opportunity to practice social and emotional skills beyond curricular areas and into real life situations.

CONCLUSION

Life Skills can be termed as the psychosocial competence or abilities which are needed to deal with situations effectively. They are the building blocks of development and health. Hence, Life Skills are universal. The impact of globalization has made the world very small and interconnected but at the same time the graded difference is creating inequalities also. The youths of today are the most vulnerable lot. The youths have to face innumerable challenges like environmental degradation, social pollution, political unrest etc. Life Skills lead them to develop positive behaviour and the ability to adjust efficiently with the needs and challenges of everyday life. The strength of positive behaviour depends on the depth of the skill acquired by the individual. Hence, with Life Skills Education, they can face these challenges more efficiently.

Life Skills training has always been present in the Indian education system since ages (Kumar, 2020). NEP 2020 has tried to reorient our education system towards the ancient values and

ethos. NEP 2020 has opened up pathways for integration of Life Skills in the curriculum through giving a thrust on development of these skills through education. Thus, the policy emphasizes on development of higher order cognitive skills as well as the socio-emotional competencies and character building. All these competencies fall under the purview of Life Skills. In order to achieve the aims of the NEP 2020 and for development of these capacities in the learner, Life Skills Education is the most essential tool. The demands of 21st century can only be met with a change in the education system and Life Skills Education is the key to this change.

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