



## Life Skills Education for Young Minds

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### ABSTRACT

*All round development is the main motive of our education system. But in the present days, due to increased population and emerging crimes, it is seen that a lot of problems and challenges come along the way of young individuals. To face these hurdles and to cope up with them diligently, it is essential to impart psychosocial skills through education that is required for independent living and smooth functioning of these young individuals. This can be acquired through life skills based education. Lifeskills are a range of psychosocial and cognitive abilities that enable the young individuals to become self-aware and self-confident, make informed decisions, innovative thinking and efficacious communication, build good relationships and rapport with others, and deal with stress and emotions. As a result, the young individuals can develop him/her-self as competent and judgmental by imbibing positive behavior.*

*This paper focuses on the significance of life skills education and ways of imparting it in school curriculum so that the young individuals can develop social, emotional and thinking skills that can help them to deal with subsequent challenges and sustain well.*

**Keywords:** Life Skill; Life Skills Education; Psychosocial; Curriculum; Challenges

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of education includes building cognitive abilities and the behavioral change of people. It also implies that the young minds should be equipped with other skills and abilities as well to adapt him/her-self to any situation by successfully dealing with the problems and challenges of his/her daily life. The process from conception to death in the mother's womb is called life and the process of applying previously acquired knowledge in real life is skill. Life skills are psycho-social skills and cognitive abilities which help us meet our daily needs and cope with problems and challenges and adapt ourselves to different situations. To cope up with these challenges, life skills should be explicitly woven into school education that equips the young minds to succeed in and contribute to the society they live in.

Young minds are considered as the most fecund members of the present society, for their physical and intellectual proficiency. However, in real scenario, the condition of the youth has deteriorated much due to lack of proper guidance and motivation. They confront various social problems like drug abuse, sexual abuse, alcoholism, violence bullying, anti-social acts, etc. that generates aggression, disappointment, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, negative attitude, etc. which affects their behavior and academic performance too.



Looking into the present scenario, there is an urgent need to provide today's youth the kind of education that can support and make their life better by overcoming the crisis in his or her own life or mental health. Life skill education is such an approach that contributes to the healthy development of the youths. It enhances critical thinking abilities, promotes self-confidence and self-esteem among the youths.

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made life skill education as an essential segment in the curriculum as it bridges the gap between basic functionalities and proficiencies. These skills keep students safe by making them practice health protective behaviors and avoiding risky behaviors so that they can thrive empathetically with surrounding and live in a harmonious society. Thus the cardinal focus of education is to develop students' inherent strengths and potentials and laying the foundation for success in all areas of life.

## DEFINING LIFE SKILLS

Life Skills are those skills and attendant knowledge which help every individual to nurture him/her-self and others in a positive manner, and are thus essential for both the individual and the society of which s/he is an important part. In the present digitized world, a number of related terms are used in the context of Life Skills i.e., 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, non-academic skills, non-cognitive skills, soft skills, character skills and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

According to *Wikipedia*, "Life skills are problem solving behaviors used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs".

World Health Organization (*WHO, 1997*) defines Life skill as "The abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life".

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (*UNESCO, 2003*), "Life skills education programmes are theory and evidence-based, learner-focused, delivered by competent facilitators, and appropriately evaluated to ensure continuous improvement of documented results".

The United Nations Children's Fund (*UNICEF, 2012*) defines life skills as "A group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life".

Thus a relevant life skill education helps in balancing the knowledge, skills, mindset of the learner and brings about the behavioral change of the learner. Effective implementation of this programme would thus be a direct investment in our nation's capital and its quality of life.

## TYPES OF LIFE SKILLS

As our lives are infinite and vast, so are our life skills. In 1997, WHO has published a paper named "Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools" – Programme on Mental Health, which comprises of two parts: Part 1, Introduction to Life Skills for Psychosocial Competence and Part 2, Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programmes. There are ten type of core (generic) life skills identified in Part 1. These ten life skills are-



- i. Self-awareness,
- ii. ii. Empathy,
- iii. iii. Critical thinking,
- iv. iv. Interpersonal relationship,
- v. v. Effective communication,
- vi. vi. Creative thinking,
- vii. vii. Decision making,
- viii. viii. Problem solving,
- ix. ix. Coping with emotions,
- x. x. Coping with stress.

An in-depth discussion about the application of the above skills has been illustrated through the life incident of two young individuals – Aarav and Saanvi. Both of them studied in class IX. They both travel to school and return home together. On the way home one afternoon, Aarav offers Saanvi to go to a park for a stroll, but Saanvi turns it down saying that her parents will be worried if she does not return home on time. However, Aarav again insisted Saanvi to go to the park but Saanvi informs him that going to the park will be a waste of study time and both of them will be hindered in solving the school-homework. Moreover, the next day, Aarav shall be held accountable in this regard in front of the teacher. This made Aarav realize his mistake and withdraws the offer to Saanvi to go to the park. Both of them pledged that paying more attention to regular education, shall help them to become good citizens of the country.

Now the ten life skills that have emerged through the above incident have been expressed as follows:

1. **Self-awareness:** Here Aarav and Saanvi have acquired the ability to clearly perceive their own physical and mental strengths and weaknesses, qualities and defects, responsibilities and duties, rights, values and ethics, mindset, gender sensitivity, etc.
2. **Empathy:** Here, the sense of compassion manifested through Aarav's ability to listen to Saanvi with his heart.
3. **Critical thinking:** Here Aarav and Saanvi thinks critically for moving forward and thereby commit themselves in the mindset of acquiring virtues such as honesty, truthfulness, modesty, punctuality, tolerance, etc., by understanding one's own emotions and needs.
4. **Interpersonal relationship:** Despite Aarav's repeated insistence on Saanvi to go to the park, Saanvi insists on her rationality and rejects Aarav's unreasonable and unwanted pressures. Thereby, interpersonal skills are revealed.
5. **Effective Communication:** Aarav gained the ability to express himself properly by listening carefully to Saanvi's argument and expressing his feelings correctly.
6. **Creative Thinking:** The ability of Saanvi to give her own opinion about going to the park which will hamper the normal pace of both of their studies. Here, the creative thinking skills help Saanvi to explore the consequences of her actions and non-actions, thereby, respond adaptively and with flexibility to the daily life situations.
7. **Decision-Making:** As Aarav comprehends the pros and cons of visiting the park, he changed his mind. This skill helps him to deal constructively with decisions about his life.



8. **Problem Solving:** Saanvi's ability to solve problems in a simple and constructive manner by using various strategies, keeping in mind that both of them will suffer if they go to the park on their way home from school.

9. **Coping with Emotions:** Here Aarav's mental state is judged by Saanvi's reasoning and both of them arrive at a simple and positive solution between the two.

10. **Coping with Stress:** In the case of Aarav's insistence on Saanvi to go to the park, Saanvi is able to reduce the intensity of the stress by recognizing the source of her stress and state it to Aarav.

All these skills together nurture holistic development of the young minds. The above illustration states that Life Skill Education is very effective and essential for any individual.

## IMPARTING LIFE SKILL EDUCATION IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS

To be a successful individual, s/he needs to be trained in basic skills which are widely accepted as the objectives of holistic education. The life skill education is a value addition programme for the youth to understand self and able to assess their skill, abilities and areas of developments. These are imparted in a healthy and appropriate learning environment where the youths can make adjustments with teachers and school and also in positive socialization.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005 has emphasized on constructive learning experiences and on the development of an inquiry-based approach, work-related knowledge and broader life skills. 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. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also has, under its agenda, life skills training focusing on upper primary girls.

In the light of the above initiatives taken regarding life skills education, some of the activities can be employed in the classroom settings which yield positive results, enhancing life skills in students when taught as a part of curriculum:

1. **Classroom Discussions:** This activity can be initiated forming small or large group in classroom where students learn from each other and also solves problem in turn. The students can have an in-depth comprehension of the topic being discussed and also develop self-confidence, empathy and skills in listening.
2. **Brainstorming:** It allows students to propagate a variety of ideas quickly about a particular topic by using their imaginative power. This helps them to think out of the box and act spontaneously. This activity is required to assess the pros and cons of each idea according to the criteria fixed on it.
3. **Story telling:** Here a particular student read out a story to a group. The other students are stimulated to engage in the discussion of important points after the narration of the story is over. This help in developing creative thinking skills within the students and also enhances attention, patience, concentration and develop listening skills
4. **Debates:** It is a situation where a particular issue or problem is presented to the class and the students are encouraged to say for or against the issue or problem. It offers the students to practice higher thinking skills and also instigates creativity.



5. **Situation Analysis and Case Studies:** Situation Analysis allows students to analyze, explore and safely test solutions for providing opportunities for co-operative working atmosphere, new additions and promotes sometimes to explore things in a different way. Case studies are treated as powerful catalysts for thought and discussion. Through this the students can develop decision-making skills and practice healthy responses to confront with risks or any challenges.
6. **Role Play:** This is a fun activity involving the whole class to be active and participative. Here, people act out a suggested situation through an informal dramatization. By this, the students can develop a potential of handling a real-life situation and also increases insight into one's own feelings.
7. **Educational Games:** It is an interactive play that teaches goals, rules, problem solving and interaction for review and reinforcement. Such games are designed to provide an entertaining educational experience, covering wide range of subjects and even critical thinking skills.
8. **Poetry, Recitation, Dance and Music:** These are some of the extra-curricular activities that can help students in awakening their aesthetic sense and be a part of their culture as well. One can adopt these activities as their hobbies and engage in spending quality leisure time and relax that help in reducing their stressful situations.

Apart from these, there can be some other methods to facilitate life skill learning i.e. by taking up community development project activities; peer supported learning; experimental learning; inquiry-based learning that can reinforce the skills for each learner in a supportive learning atmosphere.

## DISCUSSION

For today's youngsters and society, it is needless to say that life skills education is a need of the hour. This act as a good supportive system for the young minds as it specifically addresses their needs and helps in increased concentration, attention, motivation, and also helps in managing cognitive, emotional, social skills for life adjustments. It is said that life skills education is an effective psychosocial intervention strategy that boosts the young individuals to be self-confident, self-esteemed and self-reliant. Life skills education and training enhances the competencies through the optimum use of resources. Thus, it is very important to integrate life skill education into the regular school curriculum and imparting it on a daily basis to the students. The teachers must be well trained and motivated who can employ participatory and experiential teaching practices. This will help the students to be equipped with better adaptation skills helping them to overcome the challenges in their life situations to become resourceful and functional contributors of their society.

The above discussion connotes that Life Skills Education acts as a good supportive system for the students and has its importance and significance in holistic development of the students.

## CONCLUSION

In the present scenario, our education system is achievement oriented, which means that the success of an individual is mostly measured on the basis of the percentage of marks acquired

and finding a well-paid job after the completion of studies. It does not take into account that whether the individual has well adapted the positive behavior and outlook towards life which may assist to deal effectively in the society. Therefore, it is now time for us to re-think and make some alterations in the current education system fostering the 'holistic development' goal.

There is no doubt that the training in 'Life-Skills Education' will make a positive impact among the young individuals in their personal and social lives by overcoming all the obstacles and acquire the ability to live a beautiful and smooth life. For this, each school must play a unique role in creating skilled human resources by making self-reflection among the students. The teachers have to plan and provide learning experiences in their subjects such that the ten life skills are directly or indirectly developed among the students. As the students consider their teachers as their role-models therefore, the teachers and their behavior must be exemplary so as to make the students follow them. In addition to this, the school can design their curricular, co- curricular and extra-curricular activities making life-skill education a part of its mainstream curriculum. This education is gender sensitive, rights-based and age appropriate, coping with personal and social problems of both boys and girls. It would be a gateway to empower today's youth to build their lives and pursue their dreams. Thereby, our country can build healthy, efficient, disciplined and judicious individuals who achieve the all-round development and capable of contributing to the development process of building a fair and equitable society.

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