

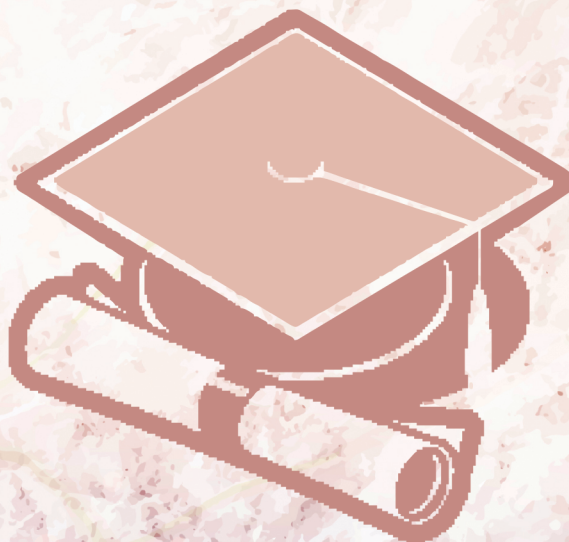
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LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN SCHOOL: ROLE OF THE TEACHERS

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Abstract

Life skills are a set of psychosocial skills that help an individual acquire the qualities required for the process of accommodation in the society. The schools can help in building these essential skills in students so that these qualities are properly nurtured, and new-age life skills are also introduced to them for survival in a sustainable world of the future. This paper proposes to address the question that in what ways teachers can help the students develop life skills through several curricular and extra-curricular activities. It focuses on the ten core life skills recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to assess the importance of these skills in advancement of one's life. The paper also looks at a few issues of the school students (at a microcosmic level) and the consequences the issues may have on a macrocosmic level. It also deals with the teachers' role in infusing these crucial skills in students in a school setting. Thereafter, the paper analyses the approaches that have been encompassed in teacher education curriculum in order to train the future teachers to become facilitators of life skills apart from the regular academic responsibilities. This study also involves a detailed review of the existing literature on the importance of introducing life skills education in schools. The paper also evaluates the significance of imparting life skills education in schools as it has been highlighted directly or indirectly in recent teacher education curricula with special reference to the National Education Policy 2020. Finally, this paper examines the indispensable role of the educators in disseminating these skills to pupils through qualitative method of research by a thorough analysis of present-day policy documents on education.

Keywords: Life skills, Teacher education, Interpersonal skills, Intra-personal skills, National Education Policy

INTRODUCTION

From the time when human beings first appeared on the map of the world, they had to invent new ways to live life, to make living easy, to come out of the problems that came along advancements. The Darwinian theory proved that the modern humans are results of continuous evolution through ages. The world has changed drastically in the past few centuries; but what has remained the same is the zeal to live a fulfilled life of accomplishments and spiritual growth to reach the goal of self-actualization. The journey starts very early in life to attain these objectives with accessing formal education, e.g., going to school, getting trained in extra-curricular activities like fine arts or sports. In today's extremely competitive world everyone is on a rat race, and we often tend to miss out on a few basic knowledge about the invaluable wealth that we have, our life. Life skills are a set of psychosocial skills that make us gain positive behavioural knowledge. In a world

with increasing negativity and humongous challenges, these skills become essential to live a satisfactory life and achieve the aim that we set for ourselves. Thus, life skills are the skills that not only help us to become better individuals but also advance our ways to contribute to the society in positive manners. Although many of these qualities can be present in a child from the time of birth itself, nurturing the inherent attributes along with training them in new- age life skills ensure better prospects of life skills attainment. Hence, besides the parental responsibility of identifying the positive traits in children and providing them with encouragement to foster these behavioural aspects, the role of the school is critical in cultivating these qualities through several curricular and extra-curricular activities as the children spend much of their time at school. This is why, the teachers need to be aware of these skills so that they can develop these in the students in versatile ways. In this paper, we will look at the most important life skills recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and analyse how these skills can be developed in students in schools. We will analyse different policy documents on education with special reference to the National Education Policy 2020 to understand the policymakers' viewpoints on life skills education in India. We will also examine how the need for training the future teachers are reflected in the curricula of teacher education and finally we will discuss the steps that can be taken to achieve the goal of training teachers to become the facilitators of life skills education at schools.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are:

- To evaluate the importance of life skills in education
- To review the recommendations of the Indian educational policies on life skills education
- To explore how life skills education can be used as a tool to manage different problems of the students in school
- To analyse different initiatives taken by educational bodies to promote life skills in students
- To discuss on the ways in which trainee teachers can develop themselves into life skills facilitators in the classrooms

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of life skills education and its implementation has been studied for many years and the need for involvement of formal educators in guiding the students had been highlighted in several policy documents. Jannat Fatima Farooqui and Rohit Gupta commented, "There has been a global acceptance about the importance of school-based introduction of life skills for adolescents and young adults" (Farooqui & Gupta, 2022). To underscore the importance of life skills education, Ravindra Prajapati, Bosky Sharma and Dharmendra Sharma opined, "Education is important, but education to support and live life better is more important. It has been felt that life skills education bridges the gap

between basic functioning and capabilities” (Prajapati et al., 2017). Narrowing this gap is essential today as there has always been this complaint in the academia that a large portion of classroom education is not functional in the practicality of life. While discussing on the relation between morality and life skills, Pradeep Kumar comments, “Life skills play an important role in preparing the foundation of a good character for a well-developed personality” (Kumar, 2021). Indeed, life skills education helps instilling moral education in students. Once popular moral education curriculum in Indian schools was one kind of life skills education, but lately the course has become obsolete. Life skills education not only emphasizes on developing cognitive abilities, but also helps in living a healthy life. While talking about age-specific life skills education at school, Esther Kirchhoff and Roger Keller comments, “During their school years, children and young people have to deal with many academic and other everyday demands. Life skills are assured to help students to cope with these demands on their own and to make an important contribution to well-being and healthy development for themselves and others” (Kirchhoff & Keller, 2021). This is the high time we give due importance to life skills in our regular curricula as Pranjit Kalita points out, “Today’s education system is more one-sided on concepts of knowledge than on skills, attitudes, and values. When we look at the needs of the complex life of today’s society, we need practical knowledge rather than simple knowledge” (Kalita, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Analytical method has been used for this study from a qualitative approach of research. Relevant data have been collected from the policy documents on education as the primary sources and several books, journals, websites as the secondary sources.

Importance of Life Skills

Life skills is defined as a set of positive and adaptive behaviours that help human beings fulfil the demands of life and face the challenges in a pragmatic way. Although life skills can vary depending on the social, ethnic, regional, and cultural differences, the core skills for developing a constructive attitude towards life remains the same.

Broadly, life skills can be divided into two divisions: intrapersonal skills, the skills that help to regulate one’s emotions and recognize one’s strengths and weaknesses (e.g., proactivity, reflection, beginner’s mind, emotional intelligence etc.) and interpersonal skills that help in cooperating with others (e.g., communication skills, humour, empathy etc.) Although the Evaluation Office of the UNICEF asserts that there is no definite list of life skills, it sets forth a few psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are crucial for a well-being-oriented life. Attainment of these skills is required alongside the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. These skills are often connected to one another and changes when the context gets altered. For example, the skill of decision making automatically involves the skill of critical thinking and analytical skills.

The World Health Organization recommends ten core life skills to foster in students

in secondary level of schooling. These include self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress, and coping with emotions.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

In this ever-changing world we are faced with new challenges everyday. With socio-cultural changes taking place on a rapid pace the most vulnerable sections of our society are faced with new challenges. The extremely competitive atmosphere in education sector adds up to this pressure which mounts heavy on the student community. On one hand, they face the general difficulties like poverty, inequality and on the other, factors like peer pressure, parental pressure, academic burden affect their state of mind. As these factors become more prominent in adolescence, the adolescents along with all students need to be trained in life skills to tackle the challenges positively. Unfortunately, the number of suicide cases in students in our country has increased manifold in the past few years. Proper knowledge of stress management and the skills to cope up with difficulties in life can save numerous lives of our students.

Likewise, another problem that the students face is the tendency of rote learning that is prevalent in school education. Improvement in critical thinking skills can help them innovate new ideas and creative thinking skills can inspire them to come up with solutions to many problems of the world. Life skills are practical qualities. Skills like problem solving, decision making do not only help the students in managing their studies and life as a student but also helps them throughout their life, especially in their work life. These skills are extremely necessary to lead a team on a project or any other work assignment in any setting, be it corporate or governmental. Learning how to cope with stress helps them handle exam pressure as well as makes them ready for work stress that they will face in future.

Not being able to cope with emotions is another issue that affects the students, especially the adolescents. These issues have long term effect on the mental state of the students. Dysfunctional families, distressful life incidences, failures to attain goals are some of the reasons for which students go into depression. It can even go to the extent of addictions and substance abuse. This can be prevented at an early stage, at least up to an extent with proper life skills training at the right time. Self-awareness skill is vital for anyone as these gives him/her an idea of his/her own value. It makes the student confident. So, it becomes easier for them to cope with failures or family problems. This is the way one can achieve self- actualization, the aim of human life.

Interpersonal skills are another set of skills that is needed to be developed in students as lacking it is another issue that is noticed in education system. There are many meritorious students who are not able to put forward their ideas, especially in a large setting (e.g., public platforms) due to lack of confidence and communication skills. They should be guided to attain good communication skills so that their ideas get expressed and they can contribute to the development of society, another goal of human life. Communication skills can be

enhanced easily with activities like extempore and debate competitions and a proper use of the language laboratories available in schools.

LIFE SKILLS IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The educational objectives in school education in India was only restricted to bringing all students to school and decreasing the dropout rate to zero till a certain point in time.

Ensuring basic educational facilities for students, especially in rural India along with increasing passing rates and test scores were the primary goals as per the needs of the age. Then the focus shifted to ensuring quality education for students in Indian schools. This approach made the policymakers focus on wholesome learning, going beyond the boundaries of only academic activities. This introduced the extra-curricular activities in school setting, which is very popular among all the stakeholders now. The extra-curricular activities have recently been called “co-curricular activities” to further including it into mainstream education system. Life skills is a part of these activities that can advance the aim of providing holistic education.

The National Curriculum Framework (2000) states that mainstream education should be closely linked to life skills. It opined that it is through these skills the students can fight various challenges like drug addiction, violence, teenage pregnancy, and many other health- related problems. It also said that these skills will make students more aware citizens as they will know about consumer rights, they will be able to question the quality of goods and services they avail, it will increase legal literacy, understanding of the civic administration etc. NCF 2000 also pointed out the essential skills like generative thinking, stress management and decision making to be very important for successful living. An echo of NCF 2000 can be found in today’s policy documents where 21st century skills like digital literacy, financial literacy is focused and encouraged to be taught to school students for living a hassle free and safe life.

The UNESCO’s Delor’s Report (1996) entitled “Learning: The Treasure Within” talked about four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. These four pillars indicated that learning can no longer be associated only with classroom transaction of information and knowledge, rather it should give more importance to applying the knowledge in practical work field, developing professional capacities through vocational education etc. The National Education Commission (1964 – 1966), under the chairmanship of Daulat Singh Kothari highlighted in detail the importance of vocational education in India. So, life skills education in different nomenclature has been stressed upon while drafting policies on education.

National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasized on making life skills education an inherent part of school education. It stated that education should implant “independence of thought and action, sensitivity to others’ well-being and feelings, learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner, predisposition towards participation in

democratic processes, and the ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change.” The framework noted that to accomplish these goals classroom learning should be relevant to real life experiences of the students.

The Central Board of secondary Education (CBSE) launched life skills education programme in 2005 as an essential part of the curriculum through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes VI to X. The board has also developed instruction manuals on life skills for teachers. In Madhya Pradesh, a programme on life skills is being run in the government schools by the UNFPA and the state government. Several such programmes have been undertaken by public or private initiatives throughout the country to enhance life skills of school students in secondary level.

In the Draft Curriculum for Life Skills (Jeevan Kaushal), published in 2019, the University Grants Commission (UGC) aimed at inculcating in students both personal and professional skills. The draft of NCF for School Education 2023 suggests using story telling and team sports as mediums of making students aware of life skills.

FOCUS ON LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN NEP 2020

The National Education Policy 2020 comes with a few changes in the education sector, it focusses on enhancing life skills in students as a basic principle of the policy. It states, “Education must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt and absorb new material in novel and changing fields.” It also includes guidance on the teachers’ role in imparting holistic education as the pedagogy should be inquiry-driven and discovery-oriented; thus, focusing on the skills of critical and creative thinking. The policy proposed that life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience will be in focus from as early as Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE).

Apart from the direct references to life skills education, focus on 21st century skills are to be noted in NEP 2020.

TRAINING TRAINEE TEACHERS TO BECOME FACILITATORS OF LIFE SKILLS

Although the policymakers envisioned for incorporating life skills into mainstream curriculum, it did not happen on a large scale because of failure in implementation. The policies can guide the system, but successful execution of the guidelines depends on all the stakeholders of the system. The teachers, being the most important stakeholder in fulfilment of educational objectives through classroom transactions have a crucial role to play to cultivate these skills in students.

Keeping this view in mind, the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) included life skills education in the teacher training courses like Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Master of Education (M.Ed.). Apart from direct inclusion in the syllabus, the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (2009) stresses on peace and value

education, inclusive education and education for sustainable development as it states, “ In order to develop future citizens who promote equitable and sustainable development for all sections of society and respect for all, it is necessary that they be educated through perspectives of gender equality, the perspectives that develop values for peace, respect the rights of all, and respect and value work.”

FINDINGS

Listed below are the findings of this study:

- Life skills education is crucial in holistic development of the students in the 21st century schools as traditional skills should be accompanied by new-age skills both in the curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- We find a continued emphasis on life skills enhancement in Indian educational policy documents but there has been a serious lack on the implementation part of it.
- Life skills not only work as making students more confident in several aspects, but these can also be vital in solving the burning issues like anxiety and academic stress.
- Although a few initiatives have been launched by different state and central educational bodies, more effectiveness should be ensured by proper management of these activities.
- As an important stakeholder of school education, teachers must be trained to become the guides who will promote life skills both through curricular and extra-curricular activities.

DISCUSSION

With increase in complexities in modern life, the need for strategical management of these complications is increasing day by day. In the upcoming days it will be crucial for our students to be able to manage their lives efficiently as the world will see rapid advancement almost in every sphere of life. These upgrades will cause a lot of changes both in the social and individual domains of people. The life skills will be crucial to deal with such changes as these will empower students to adapt in a better way and contribute to the society in positive manners. As a school is a miniature of the society and the stepping stone for a child in his/her journey to acquire formal education, this is the most fitting place to start to inculcate the skills that the student will need for the longest time in his/her life. The extremely critical role of instilling these skills in students and monitoring the changes in attitudes and behaviours must be taken up by a teacher. Thus, teacher education should also focus more on the pragmatic ways in which the future teachers can not only guide students with academics but also motivate them to live through the challenges in life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that the teaching-learning process in the classroom should be comprehensive, coming out of the traditional mode of knowledge transfer and embracing the need of the hour, the life skills education. The teachers should be encouraged to promote

life skills through various activities along with their academic responsibilities. Moreover, life skills should be foregrounded and made a part of mainstream classroom discourse. Proper policy and successful implementation can bring in the change to make our students better individuals for tomorrow, for preparing them to face the impending challenges of the changing world. Teachers need to be the torchbearers of this change.

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