



Life Skills and Well Being of Children and Youth in The Digital World

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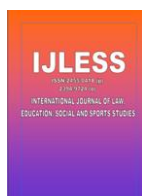
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Abstract

In today's modern digital world, the children and adolescents are increasingly using digital technologies. This has benefitted students with more social contact and more learning opportunity for the students. Digital literacy and related skills have become essential life skills. Life skills are the abilities that enable individuals to effectively navigate the challenges and demands of everyday life encompassing both personal and social aspects. The over dependence and excessive use of digital gadgets has disturbed mental health and well being of children and youth. The present generation youth are finding out various of life skills to adjust to the present digitisation. Over the past decades, the internet has become fundamental to the daily lives of millions around the world. The central role of digital technology is arguably more pronounced for children and young people who continue to go online at a younger age and spend more time online. Digital life skills are an essential part of a comprehensive reentry framework for today's world. A base of digital skills and access to technology are vital to be successful in today's society. Digital life skills help to nurture a students' ability and confidence to excel both offline and later online in a world where access is needed to improve one's life. In this paper, it is going to stress on how life skills are important for wellbeing of children and youth in the digital world.

Keywords: Life skills, Mental health, Digital literacy, well being.

Introduction

Life skills is very important in present society to lead a happy and comfortable life. It is the ability of the individual to effectively navigate and adjust to the present demanding society. In modern digital world, the children and youth have been influenced by the digital gadgets for learning the new knowledge and information. Life skills are required to manage the digital literacy and digitization in a proper constructive way without harming the well being of the mental health of the individual. There should be a time limit for digital usage. The parents have to monitor their children when they are using

electronic gadgets like mobile,computer,television etc. otherwise the children and youth will be addicted to digital world and ultimately affects their mental well being.Children and youth should be taught life skills to use the digital gadgets in a constructive way. There are so many cases coming in newspapers about digital addiction among children and youth. Mental health issues which has tremendously affected their academic performance and personal health.Many studies have shown that overuse of digital gadgets leads to eye problems,mental issues ,psychological problems among the children and youth.The parents ,teachers are the one who can give suggestions to the students to minimise and control the use of digital gadgets in a effective way.In this paper,it is going to stress on life skills and well being of children and youth in the digital world. Digital life skills are an essential part of a comprehensive reentry framework for today's world. A base of digital skills and access to technology are vital to be successful in today's society. Digital life skills help to nurture a students' ability and confidence to excel both offline and later online in a world where access is needed to improve one's life.

Objectives

1. To study the effect of digital media on youth
2. To understand the benefits of digital world in present scenario.
3. To know the importance of life skills in maintaining the demands of digital world.
4. To analyse the negative impact of digital world on mental well being of children and youth

Importance Of Life Skills

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 changes 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.

Meaning of digital wellbeing

Digital devices bring joy and opportunities into the lives of children and young people, but also risks and challenges. The main pillars for wellbeing are the same in our digital lives, and it's main cornerstone is a balanced life. Rest, active movement, social relationships, play, and routine should be

well balanced in our digital life as well. When these things are in balance, digital devices will not harm wellbeing.

Screentime is starting to be a known topic for many families. It is important to understand how much time is spent using digital devices, but the content matters as well. Parents should pay special attention to the screen time of smaller children. For example, the recommendation by the **American Psychological Association** is strict: for children under two years of age, digital media is not recommended, except for video calls. Under school aged kids should not spend more than one hour by a screen.

Benefits of digital media in present world for children and youth

The impact of digital technologies on children's health, learning and development is challenging to explore fully because technology develops faster than it is possible to evaluate fully. However, there is evolving evidence that both highlights the benefits and cautions about the risks.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the potential for children to continue learning while schools were physically closed, but also the issue of digital inequalities.

Education technologies hold the potential to transform learning and skills development for all children. They can be a great equalizer, especially for the most marginalized.

Safe and age-appropriate access to digital learning and education technologies can give learning opportunities to children who otherwise would not be able to access them, including children with disabilities, minorities, or refugee or migrant children.

Accessibility and assistive technology solutions are critical to closing the digital divide particularly for children with disabilities. Digital solutions have been a learning lifeline for children caught in emergencies.

Youths and Childrens have been using social media to a maximum extent. The platforms like Facebook, telegram, instagram, whatsapp, Educational apps, are widely used by students.

Interactive platforms like Googlemeet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex have been used by students and teachers for conducting webinars, meeting, conference, seminars , presentations.

The internet can be a rich and valuable resource for young people and social media and mobile technology have become extensions of themselves. For example: young people can obtain information about physical and mental health as well as support from online services; they can obtain information about hobbies and interests and express their creativity online; and the majority of teens report that social media can help them to develop and sustain friendships as well as being an important source of peer support . In addition, the internet provides many educational opportunities, for example, a longitudinal study identified that higher rates of home internet use have been associated with better academic outcomes in low-income families.

Increasing independent use of devices for majority of users. Independent communication with family and, as they get older, increasingly with friends and third parties (commercial). Number of children in this age group having smart phones or tablets increasing rapidly. Children begin using the internet through game consoles and handhelds.

IYF (INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION) partners cite a range of benefits to incorporating technology into life skills programs, including:

- Technology excites and engages young people.Youth welcome the opportunity to be creative and to work in trendy mediums that produce tangible results, relatively quickly.
- Technology is an effective tool for teaching life skills. Such skills include self-confidence, creative and critical thinking, responsibility, goal setting, and teamwork.

- Technology skills are extremely valuable in today's job market. Program participants often develop useful technical skills, with some going on to pursue technology-oriented careers.
- Today's technologies offer young people a means of expressing their views on issues that affect them. Youth media programs, in particular, actively engage young people in exploring issues in their community.
- Youth frequently stay involved in technology-related programs, even after the program ends. After "graduating," program alumni often serve as trainers or peer educators.
- Approaches involving technology can be a good fit for corporate donors. Companies relate to and understand the value of today's technologies.
- Technology can help enhance your program's sustainability. Technology-related programs often result in the creation of 'products' – be it videos, websites, or audio-recordings – that continue to be used even after those who made them graduate.

Technological tool to enhance lifeskills

Additional options for harnessing the power of technology to strengthen life skills programs include:

- Blogs – A blog is a web-based journal or log. Establishing blogging functionality within your organization's website can enable program participants to reflect on and communicate about their experiences.
- Podcasts – Podcasts are audio blogs. You might consider posting motivational speeches from local experts or celebrities for download on your program website, or enabling participants to post their own audio stories.
- Polls/Surveys – Your website can serve as a valuable means of collecting information about youth needs/trends in your country, and the impact of your program on beneficiaries.
- Digital stories – Collecting stories about program participants and posting them online can help illustrate the impact of your program, engage other youth, and educate the media about your efforts.
- Text messaging – With the proliferation of mobile phones globally, IYF partners have used text messages to communicate with program participants and send news updates to alumni.
- Data tracking – Several IYF partners have benefited from the development of online tools that help them track progress in achieving program outcomes.
- Online recruitment forms – IYF partners have also created online application forms, thereby streamlining the process for recruiting participants.
- Online training courses – You might consider how a portion of your program content could be delivered or reinforced through online training courses, although Internet access and costs can pose a serious obstacle.

Negative impact of digital world on mental well being of children and youth

Digital technologies can pose a risk to a child's safety and well-being when not used in an age-appropriate manner. There are risks in navigating online spaces, including cyberbullying, exposure to unwanted material, misinformation, and sexual exploitation

Bullying in general can be very damaging to child well-being and its effects can last long into adulthood. Cyberbullying may often be an extension of face-to-face bullying that children experience but it can also exist separately.

In a 2020 EU Kids Online survey⁵, including 13 EU countries, around 10 per cent of children aged 9 to 16 who used the internet said that they had experienced online bullying victimization at least once a month in the past year. Around one fifth of these children reported being "very upset" by the experience. The level of offline bullying victimization tended to be similar and slightly higher.

Children and adults unaware of the full range of risks, such as information sharing, digital footprint or formation of digital habits (priming). Parents think their children are engaging with child content only.

Frequent users of the internet but have limited knowledge of online safety. Children are predisposed to be compliant with safety messages from school/home, but if risks aren't explained clearly, they create their own explanations. Children are unaware their web use is tracked and used for suggestions and ads.

Limited critical understanding can mean that neither veracity of information, nor its purpose, are properly understood.

Presence of ads presents a confusing proposition of a consumerist message, but one which is vetted by reputable platforms/providers.

'Tech tantrums', reward loops and auto-plays make it difficult for children and adults to manage use, because their evolutionary biology (need to react) is exploited by random rewards and interventions.

Parents are uncertain of the best way to manage the dilemma of management vs. autonomy, leading to family tensions around digital use. Internet filtering may be somewhat effective.

Vision problems like shortsightedness, longsightedness, blurred vision, watery eyes etc. are rampant among youths and children which is causing concern for parents.

Digitization and mental health

Ramtanen et al. argue that mental health services are increasingly digitalised, and young people suffering from poor mental health are at greater risks of digital and, therefore, social exclusion. This suggests that mental health cannot be discussed thoroughly without addressing digitalisation, and vice versa. The European Commission's 2016 expert group on the "risks, opportunities, and implications of digitalisation for youth, youth work, and youth policy" argued that it is important to foster more equitable access to Internet services and to develop young people's digital skills so as to ensure they can maintain their competitiveness in the employment market. Here, the emphasis of the European Commission implies that during the digital era, it is important to ensure that disadvantaged children and youths can remain academically and professionally involved in order to facilitate their chances for upward social mobility. While enhancing social mobility opportunities does not necessarily improve the mental health of young cohorts, being digitally and academically excluded, as suggested by Singh et al. , is detrimental to youngsters' mental health.

Metherell et al. echoed the above arguments, finding that a lack of technological access necessary to support online interactions would result in negative mental health outcomes. Moreover, they revealed that digital exclusion discourages children and youths from participating in educational activities during home confinement and online education, further exacerbates mental health issues in children. Metherell et al.'s findings strengthen the positive relationship between digital exclusion and mental health challenges. As the world is becoming increasingly digitalised, digitally excluded school-aged youngsters who suffer from mental health issues would be seen as even more vulnerable. One of the primary reasons why digitally excluded school-aged children and youths are more mentally fragile is because they experience a higher degree of educational and social disruption relative to their digitally engaged counterparts. The lack of Internet access and computers preclude ongoing, active participation in online education and connections with peers. Since Metherell et al.'s study focuses exclusively on the British context, it would be interesting to understand further if such a context applies to socially, economically, and digitally less developed societies. Since less developed societies experience significantly less access to digital services, thus digital exclusion may not affect children's mental health adversely as much as in Britain. This is because digital inequalities may be narrower in less developed societies.

It is noteworthy that some children and youths may be trapped in a vicious cycle of digital exclusion and mental health issues. Not only does digital exclusion jeopardise mental health, but Rametanen et al. unveiled that mental health issues, especially psychosis, propel digital exclusion. Mentally ill individuals, specifically those suffering from psychosis, may face difficulties in recognising digital information. They may not be able to gain access to e-health services without the help of significant others, such as parents, teachers, or social workers. Moreover, globally, individuals needing to seek mental health services may be fearful of stigmatisation, preventing them from reaching out to professionals in a timely fashion. The provision of e-health services may be able to eradicate or minimise the stigma against those reaching out for psychiatric or psychological support because such services can be delivered while the privacy of recipients receiving services is highly secured. Compared to older counterparts, younger individuals with mental health issues are inclined to have more digital skills, familiarity, and confidence to gain access to e-mental health services. Therefore, the provision and massification of e-mental health services can be viewed as a possible instrument to minimise the mental health challenges suffered by children who are more digitally literate.

Metherell et al.'s findings show that mental health issues suffered by students were worst during the times when there was a high degree of COVID-19 restrictions when both social and educational disruptions peaked. However, when schools reopened and social restrictions were lifted, partially or in full, students' mental health had to some degree, recovered. In the Chinese context, studies from Singh et al. and Peng support that of Metherell et al., arguing that the cancellation of in-person academic and extra-curricular activities due to home confinement worsened students' mental health significantly. However, these studies overlooked whether mental health challenges are also posed by in-person schooling as well. For example, those children and youths who experience school bullying and academic stress consistently or those who live far from school may find their mental health risk further at stake if they have to return to school. On the contrary, these individuals may find e-learning more pleasant and favourable for their mental health.

In addition, when students increasingly rely on the Internet for daily activities, their risk of being victims of cyberbullying increases. Ye et al.'s findings demonstrate that 26.9% of middle school respondents in China purportedly experienced cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is harmful to children's academic engagement and mental health in the form of anxiety, depression, and suicide, fatal or not. Among respondents aged 12 to 18, 43.7% of children encountered depression symptoms, with an additional 37.4% of youths suffering from anxiety symptoms. The Council of Europe and European Commission also urges European governments to better protect the identities of online learners. Only by aptly arranging digital youth policies can school-aged students who are digitally active avoid the experience of cyberbullying; otherwise those who are constantly attacked online may put their mental health at stake. When mental health is jeopardised, Rametanen et al. argued that marginalised young people have a preference for having in-person interactions over web-based interactions with medical professionals and social workers to discuss their personal problems, despite being digitally literate. However, it is noteworthy that offline health services have a significant geographical barrier. For e-health services, individuals can receive distance medical consultations; thus, medical experts do not have to be present locally to provide medical advice and help. Especially for those dwelling in less developed regions, there may be a lack of the availability of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. Therefore, children and youngsters may not be able to seek face-to-face medical support unless they reach out to online services. As individuals with mental health issues are more likely to doubt the quality of web-based health services relative to their mentally healthy counterparts, local policymakers should carry out pilot studies to introduce and promote the benefits of e-mental health services. However, in developing countries or regions, there is a flood of digital misinformation due to the lack of rigorous online surveillance. Therefore, when non-urban young people seek medical support online, they may find web-based mental health support systems less trustworthy and reliable. It is,

therefore, additionally necessary for local policymakers, especially those in rural areas, to strengthen their online surveillance and sanction netizens and health specialists or providers who maliciously spread health-related misinformation.

Winther et al. point out that spending a prolonged duration on online activities would lead to detrimental mental health outcomes, including an increased potential to suffer from depression, social disconnection, and reduced physical activities. Singh et al. support this argument and state that a long course of digital and social media exposure may create or deepen the anxiety suffered by children. However, both studies fail to highlight whether the benefits gained from using the Internet can offset the withdrawal from social participation in in-person events.

Home confinement and social distancing restrictions prompt more children and youths to spend extra time on social media. While Singh et al. criticise that the lengthy browsing of social media worsens school-aged young people's mental health, Winther et al. argue that such a causal relationship is weak. The weak relationship may result from the fact that the benefits of using social media, especially when in-person interactions are significantly cut due to COVID-19 restrictions, offset the harm of using these online platforms. Additional literature highlights that the growth of social media use is significantly associated with higher risks of, fatal or not, suicide and depression. However, the magnitude of such an association is too weak. This raises the question of how much excessive use of social media would pose a detrimental effect on individuals' well-being. Another longitudinal research study in the Canadian, American, and European contexts demonstrates that the use of digital technologies (defined by social media, texting, and the Internet), and children's mental health (exclusively measured by anxiety and depression), are not associated. Again, the findings challenge the general perception that the excessive use of digital technologies could inflict more mental health issues on children.

Young et al. further claim that the use of social media would not pose mental health challenges but benefits youngsters. First, Young et al. focus on the general rather than the lengthy use of social media. Second, their study shows how the issue of the use of social media and children's mental health is associated should vary among contexts.

Shaw and Gant indicate that the use of social media substantially reduces the sense of loneliness and depression while boosting children's self-esteem. This suggests that the use of social media can enhance emotional and mental wellbeing. However, such literature fails to mention whether the frequency and duration of the use of social media are significant determinants of youngsters' wellbeing. Furthermore, different social media outlets are designed for varied purposes. For example, LinkedIn is used to circulate achievements and build virtual professional connections, while Instagram is a platform for social sharing. Using different social media may affect children's well-being differently. There is no single assertive answer to confirm whether the use of social media benefits or harms young people's wellbeing.

Further, for the use of digital technologies, a stable and fast Internet connection is conducive to children's mental health. Here a satisfactory Internet connection speed is particularly required for gaming rather than studying. For students who are obsessed with online games, any experience of an undesirable Internet connection speed could be frustrating, plausibly worsening gamers' mental health. Additionally, Metherell et al. reiterate that for those who face digital exclusion, their encounters with educational disruptions are much more severe relative to their digitally included counterparts. Future research should thoroughly investigate how Internet use affects the mental health of children because school closure, home confinement, public health threats, and other factors all, more or less, appear to play a role in affecting children's wellbeing. Since there are ample factors of children's encounters with mental health challenges, researchers have to keep as many relevant external environmental factors constant when investigating whether the use of Internet or social media causes children to suffer from mental health issues.

Conclusion

The life skills are very important in present generation, especially for children and youth. The life skills for using digital technology should be in constructive way. The parents should monitor their children and youth when they are using digital gadgets. They have to monitor how much time they are spending in front of digital gadgets. The youth who is able to monitor their digital hours with their self control, definitely it will be beneficial for their future. The present generation children and youth have too much of digital addiction i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Yahoo, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, gaming apps etc. This has affected enormously in their academic achievement. The youth should learn to balance digital usage with the help of life skills for mental well being and academic achievement. The student mental health will be affected, loose interest in studies. The children and youth are likely to suffer from vision problems like dry eyes, Myopia etc. It has a negative impact on overall physical and mental development of the children and youth. That's why we need to stress on efficient use of digital gadgets with the help of life skills.

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