



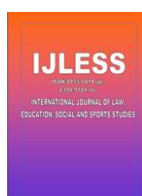
Developing Life Skills in Secondary School Students: Challenges and Future Implications

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Abstract

The development of life skills among secondary school students is essential for fostering holistic growth, adaptive competence and future readiness in an increasingly complex and dynamic world. This study examines the multifaceted challenges hindering the effective integration of life skills education into secondary curricula, including inadequate teacher training, limited curriculum time, socio-cultural barriers, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. It further explores the implications of these challenges on students' personal development, academic performance, mental health, and employability. Drawing upon contemporary educational theories and global policy frameworks, the study highlights the need for systemic reforms, inclusive pedagogical strategies and collaborative partnerships between schools, families and communities. The findings underscore that prioritizing life skills education is not only a pedagogical imperative but also a societal investment, with far-reaching implications for sustainable development and social resilience. This study investigates the development of life skills among secondary school students across diverse educational boards and geographical regions in India, with a particular focus on CBSE, ICSE and State board schools in both urban and rural settings.

Keywords: Life skills education, Secondary school students, Emotional intelligence, Critical thinking, Decision-making, Adolescent development.

I. Introduction

As social connections evolve and societal changes become more complex, individuals must be prepared to navigate challenging circumstances. Life skills education in schools serves as a global initiative to address mental health issues and social deficiencies, with mental health professionals playing an active role in this endeavor. A common term used to describe developmental learning activities is Life Skills Education (LSE). Through the application of their understanding, dispositions, and cognitive abilities, students can create and maintain healthy environments, behaviors and quality of life.

Individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) appear to benefit from LSE. To prevent HIV transmission, it is beneficial to avoid disordered behavior, antisocial tendencies, and substance abuse. Life skills education is integrated into the school curricula of many countries. For children to thrive in today's world, they need to develop a set of abilities that make them mentally, socially, and cognitively resilient, such as effective communication, sound decision-making, and emotional well-being.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1993), life skills are defined as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." These skills encompass ten core areas: Decision-making and problem-solving, Creative thinking and critical thinking, Self-awareness and empathy, Communication skills and interpersonal relationships, Coping with emotions and managing stress[1]. These skills are interdependent and reinforce each other, forming a comprehensive framework for personal development. Life skills education is considered a crucial component in driving transformative changes in global education systems. Some governments view LSE as a potential solution to public demand for more holistic educational approaches.

To adapt to the changing economic and social climate, traditional educational institutions must undergo transformation.

An essential aspect of moral and high school education is learning life skills. This component of the school day helps students enhance their life skills. Every member of the school community, both inside and outside the classroom, contributes to the shared goal of shaping young individuals into responsible members of society. Therefore, acquiring crucial life skills is fundamental to academic success. Life skills are taught to boys from the moment they enroll until they reach the age of eight as part of their education and development. Encouraging healthy and independent individuals is our top priority. By grasping the basics of identifying wrongdoing, the boys make a meaningful contribution to the school's and the community's moral life. This approach fosters a group whose members learn to value themselves and take responsibility for their actions.

Understanding how individuals manage the demands and challenges of daily life reveals that a core set of 10 interdependent abilities plays a crucial role. These skills encompass decision-making, problemsolving, critical and creative thinking, effective communication, self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Together, they form five key areas of life that are interconnected.

Institutions like the London School of Economics (LSE) are pivotal in driving transformative changes in global education. Life skills education is increasingly viewed by governments as a potential solution to public demand for more comprehensive learning approaches. To adapt to the evolving economic and social landscape, traditional educational institutions must undergo significant transformation. Teaching life skills is integral to moral development and high school education. This component of the school day helps students enhance their life skills, contributing to their overall growth. Every member of the school community, both in and out of the classroom, plays a role in shaping students into responsible members of society. Acquiring essential life skills is therefore crucial for academic success. Life skills education begins for boys upon enrollment and continues until they are eight years old, forming a fundamental part of their education and development. Fostering healthy and independent individuals is our primary goal. By understanding the basics of identifying wrongdoing, students make meaningful contributions to the school's and the community's moral life. This approach cultivates a group whose members learn to value themselves and take responsibility for their actions[2].

A. Definition of Life Skills

Life skills refer to the abilities that enable individuals to effectively manage the demands and challenges of daily life. These skills are developed through both formal education and practical experience.

Examples of practical life skills include time management, financial planning, empathy, and perseverance.

One definition of life skills is the set of competencies that individuals need to navigate the inevitable ups and downs of daily living. Due to their psychological nature and the fact that they encompass mental and behavioral processes, these abilities are often referred to as psycho social skills. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills are "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" .

Some definitions of life skills emphasize competencies that help individuals succeed in various aspects of life, whether behavioral, cognitive, or interpersonal. These skills are often categorized into three interrelated areas:

Cognitive Skills: Critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Personal or Emotional Skills: Self-awareness, self-management, and emotional regulation.

Interpersonal or Social Skills: Effective communication, empathy and building healthy relationships.

These life skills are vital for personal development, success in education and career, maintaining healthy relationships, and overall well-being. They are essential for adapting to and thriving in an everchanging world.

B. Types of Life Skills

Communication Skills : Effective communication involves the ability to express oneself clearly and engage in meaningful conversations with others. This encompasses both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. Strong communication skills are essential for success in various aspects of life, including building and maintaining relationships. Employers often value candidates who can articulate their thoughts clearly and listen actively, as these skills contribute to a positive and productive work environment.

Critical Thinking : Critical thinking is the capacity to analyze and evaluate information objectively, without being influenced by personal biases. It involves questioning assumptions, considering alternative perspectives, and drawing reasoned conclusions. This skill is invaluable for decision-making, problemsolving, and understanding complex situations. By cultivating critical thinking, individuals can enhance their ability to make informed choices and navigate challenges effectively.

Interpersonal Skills : Interpersonal skills refer to the ability to interact and communicate effectively with others. These skills include active listening, teamwork, conflict resolution, and empathy. Strong interpersonal skills are crucial for building positive relationships and collaborating effectively in both personal and professional settings. Developing these skills can lead to improved cooperation, trust, and mutual respect among individuals.

Problem-Solving Skills: Problem-solving involves identifying challenges and finding effective solutions. It requires assessing the situation, brainstorming potential solutions, and selecting the most appropriate course of action. This skill is valuable in both personal and professional contexts, as it enables individuals to address obstacles and achieve desired outcomes. To enhance problem-solving abilities, it's beneficial to approach problems methodically, consider various perspectives, and learn from past experiences.

C. The Importance of Life Skills Education in Today's World

Life skills education encompasses teaching individuals how to think critically, express themselves clearly, connect with others, and solve problems independently. In today's dynamic and unpredictable society, the significance of life skills education cannot be overstated. As the world rapidly evolves, academic knowledge alone is insufficient to navigate the complexities of modern life.

Equipping individuals with essential life skills is crucial for personal development and societal progress.

D. Adapting to a Changing World

The fast-paced technological advancements and globalization continuously reshape job duties and requirements. Consequently, it is vital for students to cultivate a growth mindset, enabling them to learn and adapt consistently. Critical thinking, problem-solving, and informed decision-making are indispensable skills for thriving in such an environment. Students must develop situational awareness, identify problems, systematically evaluate choices, and determine effective solutions. By fostering an investigative spirit, they learn to think critically and not accept information at face value. The ability to analyze and evaluate situations thoroughly is essential for making sound decisions.

E. Research Objectives

- To evaluate the Various educational boards in India, including CBSE and state boards, will have their secondary students' life skills.
- To evaluate the progress of pupils' living skills in urban and rural regions.
- To assess how gender affects the development of life skills by students in their last year of secondary school.
- To study how teaching pupils life skills affects their academic achievement.
- To study which Indian schools provide life skills education programs and how well they work.

F. Hypotheses

- H_01 : There is no significant difference in life skills levels between students of CBSE and state board schools.
- H_11 : There is a significant difference in life skills levels between students of CBSE and state board schools.
- H_02 : There is no significant difference in life skills development between rural and urban students.
- H_12 : There is a significant difference in life skills development between rural and urban students.
- H_03 : Gender has no significant influence on the development of life skills in students.
- H_13 : Gender significantly influences the development of life skills in students.
- H_04 : There is no significant correlation between life skills education and academic performance.
- H_14 : There is a significant correlation between life skills education and academic performance.
- H_05 : There is no significant difference in the availability of life skills education programs between different regions of India.

II. Review of related literature

Sarang, G & Joshi.S. (2024) has before investigated "practicing life skills: a comparative study of rural and urban secondary school" in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Significant disparities in the development and perception of these vital life skills were found in a comparative study of secondary school pupils from rural and urban areas. Effectively navigating real-world difficulties requires students to possess life skills, which include cognitive, personal, and interpersonal talents. In order to promote well-rounded growth, this study stresses the need to include life skills education in school curricula [3].

Dey et.al (2022) surveyed secondary school students in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh to determine the current status of life skill education. Adolescents in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh who are enrolled in upper secondary schools will have their life skills

evaluated in connection to socio-demographic factors. A statistically substantial gender gap exists among pupils, according to the study's findings [4].

Monika et.al (2022) undertook a study comparing life skills taught in public and private secondary schools in the Sonipat area. Life skills of students attending public secondary schools were found to be superior to those attending private secondary schools, according to the study's results [5].

Tiwari et. al (2020) had performed an experimental investigation with a sample of 135 high school students from both urban and rural areas in southern India. The results showed that after the pupils received life skills education, their personalities developed generally. The gender gap between male and female pupils is really large [6].

Suryakant Kushwaha (2019) was involved in a study that looked at the life skills curriculum at secondary schools in Varanasi that were run by the CBSE and the UP Board. The study's overarching goal is to evaluate the general life skills possessed by secondary school pupils from the CBSE and U P boards. Students' life skills average 139.92 on the CBSE board and 119.49 on the UP board, according to the study's recently disclosed results. results in a higher level of life skills among CBSE pupils compared to their UP board school counterparts [7].

UNFPA (2017), Investigation on the Adoption of a Life Skills Curriculum in Madhya Pradesh's Public School System. Physical, physiological, and mental changes characterize the adolescent years. The fastpaced emotional, psychological, and physiological changes that adolescents experience at this time are often unanticipated and unprepared for. They experience anxiety due to misconceptions over matters pertaining to growing up. Therefore, adolescence is a pivotal time in a person's life, a time of great promise but also of vulnerability if they do not have the necessary assistance and guidance to obtain reliable information and acquire the skills to make thoughtful and accountable choices. Research shows that teaching teens practical skills improves their ability to think critically and creatively, solve issues, communicate clearly, create positive relationships, understand and care for the feelings of others, and generally lead fulfilling and productive lives [8].

III. The importance of life skills education for future issues and challenges

It is critical for people to have life skills education so they can deal with the many problems and difficulties that are ahead of them. Helping people adjust to new circumstances and be ready for a future that looks quite different from our current one is one of its many potential benefits. People should be ready to deal with a variety of situations and difficulties, including:

- The rise of artificial intelligence and automation: To be ready for a future when robots may replace human work, it is vital to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability abilities in light of the fact that AI and automation are changing the employment market.
- The climate crisis: Extreme weather and rising sea levels are two new dangers that our communities face as a result of the climate issue. One way to assist people deal with the effects of climate change and adjust to the new normal is to teach them life skills.
- Global pandemics: The significance of being resilient and adaptable in the face of unexpected obstacles has been brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic. People may acquire these crucial abilities via life skills education [9].

IV. Key life skills for the future

Having transferable abilities that can propel you forward in any circumstance is more crucial than ever in today's dynamic and unpredictable environment. Possessing these abilities may make you more resilient to the stresses of both your personal and professional lives.

- Problem-solving skills: Being able to see issues, assess them, and come up with workable solutions is essential for this. Creative, analytical, and pragmatic problem-solving abilities are necessary.
- Critical thinking skills: The capacity to think rationally and base one's conclusions on evidence is essential for this. The ability to think critically may greatly assist in assessing various viewpoints and arriving at reasonable conclusions.
- Communication skills: Effective communication involves the ability to express yourself clearly and concisely, both verbally and in writing. Good communication skills can help you build strong relationships, convey your ideas effectively, and resolve conflicts.
- Self-management skills: The capacity to control one's emotions, thoughts, and stress levels is essential for this. Mastering the art of self-management allows you to remain calm, attentive, and creative, even when faced with intense challenges.
- Adaptability skills: To do this, one must be flexible and open to change. Being versatile and able to adjust to new situations quickly is a must in today's fast-paced environment.
- Resilience skills: The capacity to overcome obstacles and failures is essential for this. When you know how to bounce back from setbacks, you can keep going for what you want even when things become tough [10].

V. Methodology of the Study

Research topics, goals, and methods for data collecting and analysis may all be more clearly articulated in a study's methodology. In order to collect quantitative data on the development of life skills among secondary school students throughout India, the current research used a descriptive survey approach[11].

A. Population and Sample

- Population: The participants in this research are high school students from all around India, representing both urban and rural locations. They come from a variety of educational boards, including the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), Indian Council of Secondary Education(ICSE) and state boards.
- Sampling Method: To make sure that all regions of the nation were fairly represented, we employed a basic random sampling method. Stratified random sampling was used to choose schools, taking into consideration the disparity in school types (urban/rural, CBSE/state boards).
- Sample Size and Distribution: A total of 318 pupils from various schools in various Indian states made up the final sample. Of them, 188 were chosen from schools associated with the state board, and 130 from schools affiliated with the CBSE. For a more complete picture of how people of different socioeconomic backgrounds acquire life skills, the sample included people living in both urban and rural areas.
- School Selection: To guarantee demographic and geographic variety within the study's nationwide scope, pupils were selected using stratified random selection from four rural schools and four urban schools in separate states.

VI. Results

Several interesting trends in the acquisition of life skills by secondary school pupils, broken down by educational board, region, gender, and grade point average, emerge from the study's examination of aggregated mean scores:

- CBSE vs. State Board Students: The average life skills score of students connected with the CBSE board was somewhat higher than that of students affiliated with state boards. One possible explanation for this result is because the CBSE curriculum places a greater focus on

extracurricular and life-oriented learning, which often incorporates organized activities like SEWA (Social Empowerment through Work and Action). More chances for pupils to gain practical skills are being made available to CBSE students as part of these programs' efforts to promote students' overall development outside the classroom [12]. Comparative analysis was mainly done between CBSE and State boards, with ICSE only referred but not explicitly compared in the results.

- **Urban vs. Rural Students:** Students in metropolitan areas had superior life skills compared to those in rural areas, according to an analysis of geographical differences. Urban areas tend to have better educational facilities, more opportunities for extracurricular activities, more student counseling services, and more well trained teachers, all of which contribute to this disparity. Conversely, life skills development may be hindered in rural schools due to teacher shortages, a lack of access to resources that enhance abilities, and an overall concentration on classroom instruction rather than hands-on experience.
- **Gender-Based Differences:** The results also showed that there was a little gender gap in the pupils' life skills ratings, with the girls coming out on top somewhat. Although we found this tendency to be intriguing, we did not assess its statistical significance at this stage. But inferential analysis like t-tests or ANOVA might go further into this trend to uncover potential influences like socialization variations, classroom engagement patterns, or self-perception features.
- **Relationship Between Life Skills and Academic Scores:** There was a very significant positive relationship ($r = 0.89$) found between academic achievement and life skills ratings. This provides further evidence that children with higher SAT scores also tend to have better general life skills. This correlation lends credence to the idea that practical abilities like planning ahead, controlling emotions, keeping track of time, and solving problems are essential for academic achievement and personal growth. Instead of detracting from cognitive development, life skills education may actually enhance it and lead to better academic results [13].

Board	Area	Gender	Avg. Life Skills Score	Avg. Academic Score
CBSE	Rural	Female	71.3	71.24
CBSE	Rural	Male	70.85	71.24
CBSE	Urban	Female	70.47	70.55
CBSE	Urban	Male	69.49	70.55
State Board	Rural	Female	66.3	66.5
State Board	Rural	Male	67.65	66.5
State Board	Urban	Female	67.5	67.42
State Board	Urban	Male	67.35	67.42

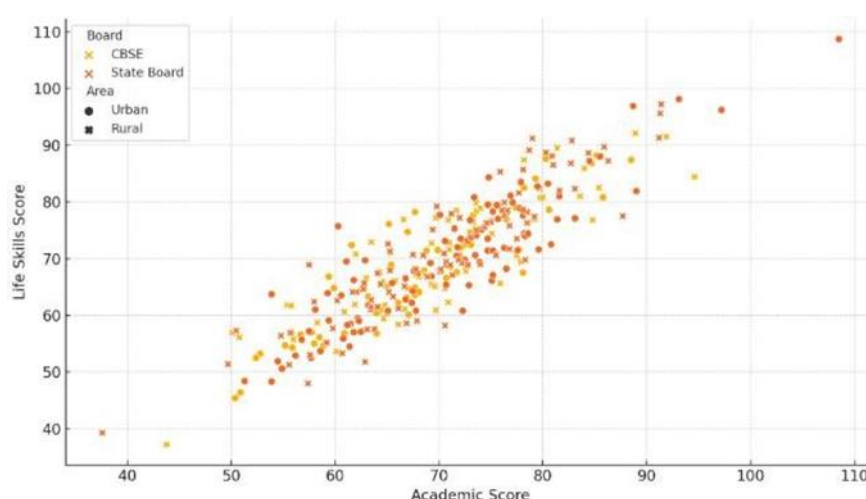


Fig:1 The Correlation Between the Life Skills Test and Academic Achievement

Table:1 Hypothesis Testing Interpretation

Hypothesis	Description	Result	Support Level	Key Finding
H ₁ 1	Difference in [Variable] by Education Board	Supported	Strong	CBSE students scored significantly higher than State Board students.
H ₁ 2	Difference between Rural and Urban Schools	Supported	Strong	Urban students scored significantly higher than Rural students.
H ₁ 3	Effect of Gender on [Variable]	Partially Supported	Mild	Statistically minor differences were observed between genders.
H ₁ 4	Correlation with Academic Performance	Supported	Very Strong	A very strong positive correlation was found ($r = 0.89$).
H ₁ 5	Availability of [Resource] across Regions	Not Tested Quantitatively	To Be Explored	Requires qualitative analysis of policy data and implementation.

VII. Discussion & Implications

A. Discussions

- The better grades might be explained by the organized life skills modules offered by CBSE schools via programs like SEWA and CCE.
- Greater access to extracurricular activities, qualified educators and improved school facilities might lead to urban advantage.
- The gender gap, however small, suggests that there may be cultural or motivational factors at play and merits investigation using inferential statistics.
- Life skills are not an unnecessary detriment to academic achievement, as the substantial association with academic performance proves.

- It is critical to include life skills education into the curriculum and ensure that teachers get adequate training in all areas, including rural areas.

B. Implications

- In order to help students comprehend and manage their priorities and everyday challenges, high school curriculum includes lessons on life skills.
- The development of high-risk behaviors, evaluation of competence, strengths, and weaknesses, and provision of improved opportunities to enhance lifestyles are all aspects of life skills.
- Adolescents' social and moral values, as well as their mental health and readiness to deal with life's challenges, may be improved via the teaching of life skills.
- Schools, particularly those affiliated with the UP Board and government institutions, must to include organized life skill instruction into their course offerings. Workshops on problem-solving, classes on leadership, and courses on emotional intelligence are all things that may be useful [14].
- Schools can boost extracurricular activities by encouraging students to take part in debates, community service, leadership programs, and projects that need them to work together in order to gain practical skills.
- Outdoor leadership camps, real-life case studies, and social responsibility projects are some examples of experiential learning opportunities that urban schools may provide to students in order to help them develop their skills.
- Educators need to be educated in contemporary pedagogical practices that prioritize critical thinking, decision-making, and flexibility.
- Parents should be motivated to help their children improve their skills at home by giving them opportunities to solve issues, take initiative, and participate in important conversations.
- Schools should encourage gender-inclusive leadership opportunities so that girls and boys have equal chances to build life skills.

VIII. Conclusion

Enhancing students' emotional resilience, social awareness, practical thinking, and decisionmaking abilities is crucial for a well-rounded education in secondary schools. Life skills education is recognized in various national and international frameworks; however, its implementation often faces challenges such as cultural resistance, rigid academic curricula, lack of legislative support, and insufficiently trained facilitators. Moreover, many educational institutions continue to prioritize logical reasoning over emotional and behavioral development.

To address these obstacles, it is essential to incorporate life skills into general education programs, provide professional development opportunities for educators, engage local communities and parents, and establish evaluation systems based on student outcomes. This approach is increasingly vital as communities confront rising rates of mental health issues, social isolation and the allure of online distractions among teenagers. Implementing life skills education can lead to a generation better equipped to handle personal and societal challenges, a workforce adept at managing interpersonal dynamics and a younger population less inclined toward risky behaviors. For instance, the Magic Bus India Foundation's Childhood to Livelihood (C2L) program has demonstrated positive impacts on adolescents' socioemotional development and school-related outcomes in India. To overcome current limitations, it is imperative for academics, educators and policymakers to collaborate in designing, assessing, and institutionalizing life skills programs. Such initiatives will produce citizens who are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of today's world.

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