



Life Skills Education: Importance and Strategies

M. C. Yerriswamy¹ and Nishantha T. N.²

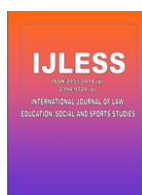
¹Professor & Dean, School of Education, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, India.

Email: mcyswamy@gmail.com

²Research Scholar in Education, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, B.E.A. College of Education, Davanagere, India.

Email: nishanth.ruthu@gmail.com

DOI: [10.33329/ijless.12.S2.537](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijless.12.S2.537)



Abstract

Education is preparing a child to deal with life effectively in contemporary society. Society changes over time. The traditional system of education can no longer provide inputs to lead a life with the kinds of complexities. Life Skills are the skills which are required by one to adapt to rapidly changing environment, both social and physical. These are skills which equip individuals to deal effectively with lead them to success and accomplishment. Life skills Education is an effective tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and control over stress and emotions. In this paper the importance of life skills education has been discussed and some techniques are suggested to develop the life skills among secondary school students.

Key words: Life skills. Strategies. Empathy. Creativity.

Introduction

The individual today is confused and baffled by the exposure to limitless information and choices based on that orientation. Although not lacking in knowledge, the learner at certain times finds it difficult to face the challenges of day-to-day life. Education today is unable to prepare the learner to fight frustration, anxiety, and depression. There is a lot of stress on achievement and performance from the teachers and parents. Children are pushed to do much more than customary to get the desired acceptance and acknowledgment from the family and society circle.(Subita, 2013) Sometimes when the pressure of subscribing to high expectations gets overwhelming, they fall back and are labelled by the school and society as a child with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Whichever way the story goes, the end products of our schooling system are children who have moderate to low self-esteem and self-concept, moderate to low tolerance for frustration, and are poor problem solvers and poor decision-makers. (Subita, 2013).

There is a dire need to change in terms of the philosophy of education in our system of education. It needs to be more humanistic. The emphasis should be given to creative thinking and reasoning and the

personal growth of the individual. Every individual is capable of thought and reason, and free will, and is capable of making choices and taking decisions. Swami Vivekananda has said that education is the divine perfection already existing in man. Every child has maximum potential and innate powers to learn. Education, today, needs to enable a child to deal effectively with the environment, make maximum use of resources, discern available opportunities and face the challenges of society. To enable these behavioural transformations in the child, the system needs to enrich the school curriculum with a highly researched and effective life skills training program. An empowered (empowered with life skills) child has the competence to cope with the challenges of life using the available resources even amidst such adversities. (Bharath and Kishor, 2010).

Meaning of life skills:

World Health Organisation (WHO, 1997) defines life skills as “the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” ‘Adaptive’ means that a person is flexible in approach and can adjust to different circumstances. ‘Positive behaviour’ implies that a person is forward-looking and even in a difficult situation, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions.

The life skills are the combination of variety of psychological and interpersonal skills which help one to live a happy, healthy and prosperous life. With the help of a set of these skills, the individual is able to adjust effectively with the needs and challenges of everyday life.

According to Powell (1995), “Life Skills are the life coping skills consonant with the development process which are necessary to perform tasks in the following areas: psychological, physical, vocational, cognitive, moral and emotional.”

To conclude, the life skills are the abilities and capacities of an individual which help an individual:

- To make wise and appropriate decision
- To develop problem solving approach
- To develop critical thinking
- To communicate effectively
- To develop positive attitude
- To develop healthy life-style

Ten core life skills:

1. Social skills
2. Self-awareness
3. Effective communication
4. interpersonal relationship
5. empathy
6. thinking skills
7. critical thinking
8. creative
9. Thinking problem solving
10. decision making

Need for life skill:

Life skills act as facilitators to strengthen the survival capacities of the individual by providing him an orientation to basic education, major health issues, and social and basic management skills for active community participation. Life skills are essential for:

- The promotion of healthy child and adolescent development;
- Prevention of key causes of child and adolescent death, disease, and disability;
- Socialization;
- Preparing young people for changing social situations;

Therefore, life skills not only contribute to one's personal growth and development but also make an individual interesting and dynamic. Life skills help an individual to improve his working capacity as he will be able to contribute and participate effectively in a workplace situation. Life skills are developed as a result of constructive processing of information, impressions, encounters, and experience, -both individual and social - that are a part of one's daily life and work and the rapid changes that occur in the course of one's life. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life (Nair, Subasree, and Ranjan, 2010). These skills enhance the ability of the person in this rapidly transforming environment and empower them to make aware of their future life. Life skills are essential to any type of educational or training organization system and can be introduced at any stage or level of education.

Life skills in education:

Life skill education is a program where life skills are imparted in a supportive and effective learning environment. Life skills education is essential for all children and especially for adolescents because the young blood of us seem to be most vulnerable to behaviour-related health problems. Life skill education is an emerging area of scientific study. The genesis of the life skills education approach in recent decades lies in a significant movement to review the basics of social science like Psychology, Sociology, and Social Work (Nair, Subasree, and Ranjan, 2010). Life skills education is a value-added program for the young generation to understand themselves and able to assess their abilities and areas of development. It aims to provide students with various strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life. Life skills are the objectives of holistic education. A parallel can be drawn between the objectives of education mentioned in the Delors Commission Report (1993) with life skills. The life skills may be grouped into four objects of education proposed in the report of the Delors Commission. (UNESCO 2005) Thus learning to know comprises knowledge and critical thinking, learning to do implies practical skills, learning to be is synonymous with personal skills while learning to live is all about social skills (Sengupta, Sinha & Mukhopadhyay, 2012). Among adolescents, boredom, rebellion, disorientation, peer pressure, and curiosity are the hosts of factors that promote high-risk behaviour such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and casual relationships. The psychological push factors such as the inability to tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations, and anxieties about the future are often the driving force for high-risk behaviour. Life skills education is an effective tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative, and control stress and emotions. It is based on the assumption that when young people can rise above emotional impasses arising from daily conflicts, entangled relationships, and peer pressure, they are less likely to resort to anti-social or high-risk behaviours.

Techniques for developing life skills

Life skills education can be designed to be spread across the curriculum, to be a separate subject or integrated. Following are some techniques to enhance life skills in students:

Debates: Debate is a form of discussion. In this technique, the topic chosen for the discussion is controversial in nature. It is a group technique and the students of a class are divided into two group. It allows the students to defend a position (favour or against). Debate is a useful technique to help students in practising and learning different life skills.

Riddles and Puzzles: A riddle is a type of statement, question or phrase, whose purpose is to make the person think. A puzzle on the other hand, is a type of game, problem, or toy, the purpose of which is to test a person's logical reasoning. These techniques enable students to assess outcomes, compare ideas, synthesise information and draw conclusion from a given piece of knowledge. Riddles and puzzles serve both the purposes of entertainment and development of core life skills needed for leading a happy life.

Seminar: Seminar is also a group technique in which students are given a theme or topic for discussion. It is a technique which uses scientific approach for the analysis of a problem chosen for the seminar. The seminar may be organised in a variety of ways depending upon its objective and the resources available. Seminar is a useful technique for promoting life skills like critical thinking, synthesis and evaluation, effective communication and collaboration, and inter-personal relationship among students.

Quiz: A quiz is a kind of brain teaser. It is asset of questions which can be used for assessing students on different domains. It is a helpful technique to arouse interest in students to learn more effectively and make improvements subsequently. Quiz can be organised at different levels and for different purposes. In the area of life skills, the quiz technique can be used to enhance students' social efficiency, intellectual abilities, and emotional maturity. It can be used to help students learn and practise the social skills and thinking skills.

Brain Storming: "Brain storming is an approach to increase creativity and openness for problem solving" (David,2008). Brain storming is based on the assumption that when the students are provided an opportunity to interact in a free environment, they are able to generate more creative ideas. The ideas generated by one person stimulate others thinking process. The exchange of ideas creates a situation of discussion and spontaneous thinking.

Story Telling: A story is told or read by students or teachers by using pictures, books, comics, slides, etc. Story telling is an art and this technique is a skilful teaching process. It develops the power of imagination among the students. Stories are motivating and can help develop positive attitudes. It enhances students' communication skills and listening skills.it helps students developing moral values, social values and cultural values.

Role-playing: It provides an excellent opportunity for developing various life skills, especially empathy as in role-playing students has to play the role of another person. A student learns how one might handle a potential situation in real life. This helps in increasing insight into one's feelings.

Buzz Group: Students during this activity are divided into small groups of five or six members and they have to carry out a task. By doing so, students know each other better and learn to help their peers.

Games: Games promote active learning, decision making, discussion, and fun. It promptly competition among participants as they work hard to prove their talents. It enables students to use their knowledge, attitude, and skills.

Situation Analysis: During situation analysis, students are allowed to explore problems and safely test solutions. It provides opportunities to work hard, share feelings and develop critical thinking. Other important methods to facilitate life skills learning include peer-supported learning, practical community development projects, and audio-visual activities i.e., music, dance, and theatre.

Life skill education cannot be facilitated based on information or discussion alone. It is not only an active learning process, but it must also include experimental learning i.e., practical experience, and reinforcement of the skills of each learner in a supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

Life skill education lays the foundation for learning skills that enhance the self-direction of the individual. It would be a way of empowering youth to build their lives and their dreams. It would be a means of handholding them through the critical stages in their life and helping them tap their potential to the fullest. Thereby, it is hoped that the current education system with its oppressive rigidity would open up and make life skills education a part of its mainstream curriculum. This would enable the country to build individuals who believe in themselves, who are efficient leaders and administrators, who can understand their potential and achieve them. (Subita, 2013) By realizing these skills he will be able to monitor his understanding and learning needs. He will commit to learning as life long process.

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