

DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

Dr. Baddepudi Jhansi Rani

ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Viswavidyalayam, Tirupati,
Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Abstract

Life skills are described as "a behavior changes or behavior development approach which is designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills" by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007). Rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes are hallmarks of early adolescence, a critical developmental time. Young people actively seek to define their identity and sense of self throughout this developmental stage. During this period, individuals encounter complex social, intellectual, and personal challenges, while simultaneously acquiring new knowledge and developing essential skills. The structured and systematic implementation of Life Skills Education becomes essential for this transitional stage. Life skills education is becoming popular in the contemporary global environment because it helps teenagers convert their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs into positive actions. These abilities form the cornerstone of psychosocial competence and self-worth. With these skills, people may investigate several options, balance advantages and disadvantages, and make logical choices to deal with life's obstacles. Ten key methods are listed in the UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO guidelines: problem-solving, critical and creative thinking, effective communication, decision-making, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, and the capacity to manage stress and emotions. In the end, these competencies develop the emotional, mental, and resilient skills required to overcome everyday challenges and make a significant contribution to society.

Key Words: challenges, effective communication, life skills, school education, society

Introduction

Life skills in school education refer to the cognitive, emotional, and social abilities that help students manage everyday challenges, adapt to changing environments, and make responsible choices. Integrating these into the curriculum ensures holistic development beyond mere academic achievement.

Schools typically group these core competencies into three main categories:

1. Cognitive and Thinking Skills

- Critical Thinking: Analyzing information objectively rather than just memorizing facts.
- Creative Thinking: Developing outside-the-box solutions to problems.
- Decision-Making & Problem-Solving: Evaluating options and assessing the consequences before taking action.

2. Personal and Emotional Skills

- Self-Awareness: Understanding personal strengths, weaknesses, and emotions.
- Stress Management & Emotional Regulation: Developing resilience and coping with the daily pressures of academic and personal life.
- Goal Setting: Organizing time and personal development metrics.

3. Social and Interpersonal Skills

- Effective Communication: Expressing needs, feelings, and ideas confidently and clearly.
- Empathy: Understanding and relating to the feelings and experiences of others.

- Collaboration & Conflict Resolution: Working harmoniously in teams and handling disputes respectfully.

How Schools Develop These Skills

Educators generally move away from rote learning toward experiential learning. This is achieved through:

- Collaborative Group Projects: Fostering teamwork, communication, and negotiation.
- Role-Playing and Debates: Encouraging critical thinking, empathy, and creative problem-solving.
- Practical Life Activities: Incorporating financial literacy, time management, and real-world civic scenarios into the curriculum.

Institutions like UNICEF and the World Health Organization advocate for Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) to build resilient, well-adjusted individuals who are prepared for both the modern workforce and everyday life.

Review of Literature

Life skills constitute the psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to reach their full potential, maintain emotional well-being, and navigate social relationships through prudent decision-making. As Nair and Ranjan (2020) observe, life skills education represents a holistic approach that promotes the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial abilities. These skills should be appropriate for the learner's age, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the individual's developmental milestones throughout life. Moreover, the principles of Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda emphasize the significant importance of teaching these life skills. Vivekananda, in particular, argued that true education extends beyond the mere accumulation of information and encompasses the development of character and the realization of the perfection already inherent in humanity. Individuals who receive life skills education exhibit appropriate conduct and are better prepared to manage daily life challenges (Vranda & Rao, 2011). By promoting behavior modification, life skills education assists students in addressing life problems and developing psychosocial competence (Razia, 2016).

According to Vranda and Rao (2011), life skills may be grouped into the following domains: learning/academic skills (such as study skills, literacy, and learning from experiences); relating skills (including communication, initiating, sustaining, and concluding relationships, assertiveness, and conflict management); work and recreation skills (encompassing time management, financial management, and career planning); and the development of self and others' abilities (covering creative problem solving, positive self-perception, decisionmaking, stress management, transition management, regulation of negative emotions, self-awareness, and maintenance of physical well-being). These competencies are recognized as playing a crucial role in aiding young people to overcome obstacles and to become productive members of society (Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017; WHO, 1993)

Program for Adolescent Education (2005) Adolescents constitute the nation's most vital demographic force, driving social transformation. They represent a resource that must be developed and educated to produce future leaders and productive members of society. This group is particularly vulnerable due to a frequent lack of awareness regarding the risks of substance addiction, sexually transmitted infections, and the maturation process. They often lack the social networks necessary to seek reliable information and assistance in addressing such issues. The vulnerability of girls and young women is further intensified by various social factors, including early marriage, early pregnancy, a high maternal mortality rate, domestic abuse, and restricted access to educational opportunities.

Youth who possess knowledge and competencies are more inclined to make prudent choices concerning their relationships, careers, habits, and physical and mental well-being. The objective of life skills education is to enable young people to cultivate moral principles. It would ease the transition into adulthood for today's stressed youth. Adolescents derive several benefits when they acquire Knowledge, Attitudes, Values, Enhanced Life Skills (KAVELS). Those endowed with these life skills are better equipped to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, foster healthy relationships, demonstrate empathy, and manage their lives in a constructive and healthful manner. Back in 2005, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) teamed up with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) to launch the Adolescence Education Program, or AEP. The whole idea behind AEP is to equip every young person between 10 and 19 with the know-how and skills they need to stay safe from things like HIV, STDs, drug use, violence, mental health issues, and anything that could mess with their productivity. This program trains teachers and some of the students themselves, who then go on to teach their peers. It's pretty much a nationwide initiative covering all secondary and senior secondary schools. Right now, the plan is for trained teachers to deliver it in 9th and 11th grades, spending at least 16 hours on it each school year. The way AEP teaches is all about getting people involved, focusing on practical life skills, and making it a two-way street.

The goals of AEP were:

1. to equip students with useful life skills for handling adolescent challenges through extracurricular activities;
2. to provide them with correct information about puberty, drug use, and various sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
3. to foster responsible actions and positive outlooks on growing up; and to assist them in navigating gender biases and stereotypes.

Supplementary Initiatives by the Indian Government Through India's three national school systems—CBSE, NVS, and KVS—the NCERT has implemented a co-curricular approach to Life Skills Education, which can be integrated into the curriculum with or without grades. In 2008, the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) launched post-graduate courses in life skills and developed a training guide for teaching teenagers and young people. RGNIYD also conducted multiple training seminars to spread awareness of life skills programs nationwide.

The National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF), introduced in 2013, emphasized skill training, professional knowledge, core competencies, and attitudes across all educational programs. In 2016, India established a new policy for skill development and entrepreneurship along with a dedicated Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. Institutions such as the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), and Sector Skill Councils were created in a public-private partnership model. The Skilling India project was launched in mission mode to promote widespread skill acquisition. Life skills components have been integrated into both academic and vocational training curricula. This approach ensures that learners acquire not only technical and professional skills but also essential life competencies. Overall, India's framework combines educational policy, institutional support, and practical training to mainstream life skills development nationwide.

Life Skills Education: Facilitators' Guide (2014) In 2014, the Psychiatry Department of NIMHANS Bangalore developed a facilitator's guide to teach life skills to Indian adolescents. It addressed critical issues including nutrition, communicable diseases, substance

abuse, behavioral addictions, early marriage, sexual abuse, gender concerns, aggression, and major life choices. The guide emphasized the facilitator's role, participatory and peer-group learning techniques, mental health awareness, and counseling principles. This structured framework provided a comprehensive approach for promoting holistic adolescent development and essential life competencies. Initiatives In Higher Education Since 2019, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has incorporated Life Skills into the curriculum for all undergraduate programs in India. The initiative aims to provide students with essential competencies, including communication, interpersonal skills, time management, teamwork, flexibility, problem-solving, decision-making, leadership, and universal values. According to UGC, integrating these skills enhances students' employability, self-esteem, and overall preparedness for personal and professional challenges. The Life Skills (Life Skills 2.0) curriculum developed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) is in line with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It emphasizes holistic and learner-centred education beyond traditional academic knowledge. The curriculum focuses on developing communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It enhances professional competencies like teamwork, leadership and employability skills. Emotional intelligence, stress management and resilience are also its major components. The program covers digital literacy, cyber ethics and responsible use of technology. Universal human values and constitutional principles are also incorporated to promote moral and responsible citizenship.

Experiential learning methods like role-playing and case studies are helpful in developing practical skills. The curriculum is multidisciplinary and adaptable to graduate programs. Overall, it prepares students to become competent, moral and socially responsible individuals in line with NEP 2020. National Curriculum Framework (2021) The Ministry of Education (MoE) and NCERT developed the preliminary draft of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2021) in line with NEP 2020 recommendations. NCF 2021 recommends that grade IX students' study "Individuals in Society," covering political, economic, sociocultural, and environmental domains. The curriculum promotes ethical and moral reasoning and integrates knowledge from multiple disciplines, making it interdisciplinary in nature. It also facilitates the development of critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and social-emotional competencies, enabling students to apply learning in real-world contexts beyond the classroom.

Life skills refer to the psychosocial competencies required to manage diverse situations and form the foundation for personal growth and well-being. They are universal and essential in a globalized world, where interconnectedness coexists with increasing inequalities, exposing young people to challenges such as social pollution, environmental degradation, and political instability. Life Skills Education fosters positive behavior and adaptability, enabling individuals to overcome obstacles effectively. The depth of mastery in these skills strengthens the consistency of constructive behaviors. In India, life skills have long been part of the educational system, and NEP 2020 emphasizes their integration into the curriculum to align education with traditional values and ethos. The policy highlights the importance of developing higher-order cognitive abilities, socio-emotional competencies, and character formation, collectively constituting life skills. Life Skills Education thus serves as a fundamental mechanism for achieving NEP 2020 objectives and preparing learners to navigate the demands and challenges of the twenty-first century.

Technology and Education: Together Enhancing Life Skills Development

The amalgamation of technology and education has seen the face of revolution to create waves in teaching life skills. In today's digital age, technology with its growing prevalence serves as a powerful tool that can enhance life skills learning in schools through variety of

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online learning platforms, educational apps, and digital tools. The best schools nearby understand that technology offers opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving that go beyond the conventional classroom setting.

In a fun and engaging manner, students can use educational apps to practice time management and organizational skills through interactive tools and exercises. By engaging in group projects using digital communication tools, they pick up the art of collaboration, effective communication, and conflict resolution with their peers. Moreover, the schools that have introduced coding and programming courses, encourage the students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities while learning to work with technology. These skills are intertwined and equally crucial for their academic and future career success.

By meddling their hands at technology and education, students also get the chance to explore a variety of career paths by experiencing virtual simulations, video conferencing, and online internships-experiential learning and getting a glimpse into the professional world, allowing them to gain real-world experience and the much needed skills needed to succeed. With technology, the students gain confidence in their ability to navigate the workforce and make informed career choices.

Conclusion

Life skills learning will provide students with the required skills in their daily lives. These are communication skills, problem-solving skills, empathy, and self-awareness skills, among others. These skills play a central role in the day-to-day life of students and their future success, and so mastery of these skills comes in handy in the academics of students and in their future employment. It deals with the development of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies, and the vital competencies in life are critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and emotional coping. The life skills education helps people to manage the life requirements of living in the world, making good decisions, adjusting to those situations and establishing healthy relationships.

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