



A phenomenological research insight in life skill education for Adolescents with respect to their major issues and concerns

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Abstract

Life skill education has now become an integral part of the curriculum. As life skills are essential to help in achieving quality in life, phenomenological research as a qualitative research method helps us provide an insight of the various problems and concerns related to Life Skill Education of adolescents. Being based exclusively on experiences in context or horizons, the phenomenological research approach gives a better understanding of the vicissitudes that take place in them and can suggest the measures in coping well with the issues of their life.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Phenomenological research, Life skill education

Introduction

The idea of introducing the Life Skill education among school children in India clearly focuses on the need of imparting not only quality education but also in leading a life of quality. It can be stated as a plight of research that even to evaluate the quality we need to rely on various quantitative methods of research. Quantitative measures depict improvement and achievement in terms of scores but they cannot assess the new paradigm shift in education, where the objective is the inculcation of various skills which help students not only in academics but also in social-emotional aspects of life.

Life Skill Education:

The Life-Skills Education as defined by the UNICEF is "*a behaviour change or behaviour development approach to address a balance of three areas; knowledge, attitude and skills*".

Life Skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitude and values into actual abilities, that is, what to do and how to do it, given the scope and opportunity to do so.

In recent years, the concept of Life Skills has been popularly used particularly in the context of health and reproductive health. World Health Organization has defined Life Skills as "*The abilities 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 is able to adjust in different circumstances. 'Positive behaviour' implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situations can identify a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions. Life Skills are the abilities that help in the promotion of mental and social well being and competence in young children to face the realities of life. The ultimate aim of Education is the overall development of a child's personality which cannot be achieved without exposing students to various Life Skills.

Phenomenology :

- (1) A description of the givens of immediate experience.

- (2) An attempt to capture experience in process as lived, through descriptive analysis. It studies how things appear to consciousness or are given in experience, and not how they are in themselves, even if it is known that the given contains more than or is different from what presented. (For instance, the fear of being bullied at school impacts a child's inter-personal skills and may result in keeping himself confined at home also) The answers bring us closer to the phenomenon that is lived.

- (3) A method of knowing that "begins with the things themselves, that tries to find a 'first opening' on the world free of our perceptions and interpretations, together with a methodology for reducing the interference of our preconceptions.

(4) A method of learning about another person by listening to their descriptions of what their subjective world is like for them, together with an attempt to understand this in their own terms as fully as possible, free of our preconceptions and interferences.

In ordinary life, we "capture" and conceptualize everything, using our preconceptions to turn everything into something other than it actually is. Phenomenology strives to clarify our receiving abilities and rediscover the actuality.

The Existential Dimension: Phenomenology is a way of unfolding the dimensions of human experience ; how we exist in and live in our world. It examines:

- a. What is distinct in each person's experience?
- b. What is common to the experience of groups of people who have shared the same events or circumstances?

The idea or notion of the phenomenological research lies in this very life-world known as *lebenswelt*, a term explicated by Edmund Husserl in his book *The crisis of European sciences*. The life-world is the world we experience in everyday living. Experiences are not isolated but take place in a particular context or horizons. For Example if a teacher experiences a behaviour modification he/she experience that in a given time or space provided and with regard to a certain context. Further the Hermeneutic and Existential phenomenology focused attention on being-in-the-world. This enabled them to view the 'human relationship in the worlds' in terms of the individual concrete experience. In pedagogically we can state that phenomenological research deals with the real life experiences of a child.

Phenomenological Research:

Purpose of the phenomenological research is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and

representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s). Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions.

Significance of the study :

Life Skill education deals with the experiences, adjustments and adaptations of adolescents. Keeping in mind the physical and emotional changes that take place in adolescents, it is inevitable for the parents, teachers and school to take account of the changes and help them to deal with it.

Phenomenological research can give an insight into the quality of life that the students are leading and living . Below mentioned are the issues and concerns of adolescents students as outlined by the Central Board of Secondary Education.

KEY ISSUES & CONCERNS OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

Developing an Identity

- Self – awareness helps adolescents understand themselves and establish their personal identity. Lack of information and skills prevent them from effectively exploring their potential and establishing a positive image and sound career perspective.

Managing Emotions

- Adolescents have frequent mood changes reflecting feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, fear, shame, guilt, and love. Very often, they are unable to understand the emotional turmoil.
- They do not have a supportive environment in order to share their concerns with others. Counselling facilities are not available.

Building Relationships

- As a part of growing up, adolescents redefine their relationships with parents, peers and members of the opposite sex. Adults have high expectations from them and do not understand their feelings.
- Adolescents need social skills for building positive and healthy relationships with

- others including peer of opposite sex. They need to understand the importance of mutual respect and socially defined boundaries of every relationship.

Resisting Peer Pressure

- Adolescents find it difficult to resist peer pressure. Some of them may yield to these pressures and engage in experimentation.
- Aggressive self conduct; irresponsible behaviour and substance abuse involve greater risks with regard to physical and mental health.
- The experiment with smoking and milder drugs can lead to switching over to hard drugs and addiction at a later stage.

Acquiring Information, Education and Services on issues of Adolescence

- Exposure to media and mixed messages from the fast changing world have left adolescents with many unanswered questions
- The widening gap in communication between adolescents and parents is a matter of great concern.
- Teachers still feel inhibited to discuss issues frankly and sensitively.
- Adolescents seek information from their peer group who are also ill informed and some may fall prey to quacks.
- Fear and hesitation prevents them from seeking knowledge on preventive methods and medical help if suffering from RTIs and STIs.

Communicating and Negotiating safer life situations

- Sexually active adolescents face greater health risks.
- Girls may also face mental and emotional problems related to early sexual initiation
- Resisting the vulnerability to drug abuse, violence and conflict with law or society.
- The study can open various issues on quality of education through qualitative research method.

Significance of the study :

- In India, not much emphasis is laid on usage of qualitative research in education especially in Life Skill Education.

- Schools will become morally responsible in ensuring the development of life skill abilities among the students.
- There is no well defined assessment/evaluation technique to evaluate the development of life skill, it is only possible through qualitative methods.
- The phenomenological research can give an insight in understanding the “lived in” experiences of the students, understanding the intensity of the problem on a larger scale.
- If used by teachers in group, this research methodology can help them to understand actual perspectives of the students in all.
- It is not based on mere collection of quantitative data. Rather it seeks opinions, subjective accounts and interpretations of the participants.
- Being based on rich narrative descriptions it can give in-depth understanding of the concepts and behaviours.
- It focuses on ‘why’ and ‘how’ behaviour occurs.
- Generalizations are only made after synthesizing the informations.
- The life skills which are given by World Health Organization (WHO) are:
 1. **Self-awareness:** Includes recognition of ‘self’, our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It is often a prerequisite to effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy with others.
 2. **Empathy** - Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. We grow up in relationships with many people in the family and in the society. Empathy can help us to accept others, who may be very different from ourselves. Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviour towards people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance, as is the case with AIDS sufferers, or people with mental disorders, who may be stigmatized and ostracized by the very people they depend upon for support.
 3. **Critical thinking** is an ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping us to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

4. Creative thinking is a novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components –
 - fluency (generating new ideas),
 - flexibility (shifting perspective easily),
 - originality (conceiving of something new),
 - elaboration (building on other ideas).

5. Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health. It can teach people how to actively make decisions about their actions in relation to healthy assessment of different options and, what effects these different decisions are likely to have.

6. Problem solving helps us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain.

7. Interpersonal relationship skills help us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. It may also mean being able to end relationships constructively.

8. Effective communication means that we are able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions and desires, and also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

9. Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax.

10. Coping with emotions means involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.

Implementation of the research:

Max Van Manen in his book '*Researching Lived Experience*' does not offer any step-by-step formula for conducting research instead he identifies ways of 'investigating experience as we live it' and of making sense of the investigations. He puts following ideas for getting started:

- Use personal experience as a starting point
- Trace etymological sources. Doing this might help to put us in touch with the origins of the word and its original meaning.
- Search for idiomatic phrases. Such phrases can possess interpretive significance.
- Obtain experiential descriptions from other. We borrow other people's experience to come to a deeper understanding of human experience.
- Protocol writing: A key way to find out human experience is to ask participants to write down their experiences.
- Interview: This is seen as a way of gathering experiential material. Concrete experiences should be sought.
- Observe: A way of entering in the life world of person is to be a participant and an observer at a same time.
- Use experiential description in literature: poetry, story forms, journals, biographies, diaries can serve as possible sources of human experience.
- Use art as a source of lived experience
- Consult the phenomenological literature. For example: Materials that has already addressed the topic.

Techniques which are already used are also the techniques of collecting data for phenomenological research. The central board of secondary education has listed the following techniques for Life Skill Education:

- Class discussions
- Brainstorming
- Demonstration and guided practice
- Role plays
- Audio and visual activities, e.g. arts, music, theatre, dance
- Educational games and simulations
- Case studies
- Story telling
- Debates
- Decision mapping or problem trees

Other techniques are:

- Diary writing
- Interviews
- Opinion writing

Conclusion:

In his book *'The Tact Of Teaching'* Manen provides an original perspective on the practice of teaching as a reflective, sensitive and tactful activity - Tact is described as 'Being open to child's experience, as attuned to subjectivity and is governed by the insight while relying on feeling.

Phenomenology offers an alternative theory of experience as a theoretical horizon in which researchers can find space for the various epistemic acts they exercise.

- The issues and the concerns of the adolescents require a phenomenological approach towards understanding the life experiences better and developing the ability of positive attitude.
- The phenomenological research is the in-depth assessment of the life-world and genuine experiences which can help the adolescents deal with the changes and pressures around them thus enhancing their life skills.

- A qualitative researcher gets to acquaint with the reasons of the problem, its intensity, its various dimensions and its proliferation.
- Phenomenological research respects the subjectivity of an individual but at the same time looks into the various responses of individuals in a given context or horizon.
- The research findings of phenomenological research can suggest possible remedies and appropriate usage of the techniques in solving the problems of the adolescents on a larger scale.
- Phenomenological research findings open research options for other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and applied economics which have direct relation with the life skills of adolescents.
- Phenomenological research suggest issues for behavioural modification.
- The remedies suggested after phenomenological research findings can be applied on a larger scale in addressing the problems of adolescents and enhance their Life Skill.

Suggestions:

- The researcher using phenomenological research method should be very good at listing experiences and organising them well because the data collection is on a very higher scale.
- The assessment techniques of Life Skill education also needs to be developed without which the effectiveness of skill enhancement techniques is affected.

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