



IDENTIFICATION OF LIFE SKILLS AND IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON LIFE SKILLS

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Abstract

In this article named "Life Skills" author has tried to explain concept of life skills and identification of different types of life skills. Life Skills are behaviors used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs. They are a set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life. The subject varies greatly depending social norms and community expectations. Life skills programs have come to play an important role with regard to health—particularly mental health—in both the developing and developed countries. In general life skills development, there have been reported signs of improvement in problem solving, communication, and coping skills.

Keywords: *Life Skills, Behaviors, Personal Affairs, Human Skills, Social Norms, Mental Health, Problem Solving, Communication, and Coping Skills.*



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INTRODUCTION

"Life skills" are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They are loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and inter-personal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others.

World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1993 defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life."

UNICEF defines life skills as, "a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills." Therefore, life skills are a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills, which can help people, to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life. The

main objective of life skills education is to promote healthy lifestyles through health education. The approach has been integrated into curriculum development for schools and has also been implemented through other channels. Life skills approach includes elements that make it easy to adapt to different cultures and appropriate for implementation in both developing and developed countries. Due to the broad nature of the skills it develops, the effectiveness of this approach may not be easy to quantify. The emphasis of this approach is on basic personal and social skills, attitudes, and knowledge helpful in making positive decisions and lifestyle choices.

Through the involvement of the World Health Organization (WHO), life skills programs have come to play an important role with regard to health—particularly mental health—in both the developing and developed countries. It, and the content and effectiveness of individual initiatives developed within this framework. According to WHO, life skills may be defined as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (World Health Organization, 1997a, p. 1).

“Every school should enable children and adolescents at all levels to learn critical health and life skills. Such education includes...comprehensive, integrated life skills education that can enable young people to make healthy choices and adopt healthy behaviour throughout their lives” (World Health Organization, 1997b, p. 80).

The life skills approach lends itself well to implementation across cultures and has been integrated into curriculum in various countries. For example, South Africa’s *Curriculum 2005* includes “life orientation” and skills for decision-making, critical and creative thinking, and effective communication. Also included are skills for developing healthy relationships and a positive self-concept (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 1997).

Core skills to be developed

The themes addressed by this approach cover a broad range. They include core skills and additional areas that can be addressed in a culturally sensitive manner.

Core skills that should be developed include

- decision-making – ability to evaluate information and advice to make informed decisions, assess advantages and disadvantages of different options, change decisions to adapt to new situations, and plan for the future;
- problem solving;

- creative thinking;
- critical thinking – ability to analyze social and cultural influences on attitudes, values and behavior, question inequality, injustice, prejudice and stigma, explore and evaluate social roles, rights and responsibilities, and evaluate risks;
- effective communication;
- interpersonal relationship skills;
- self-awareness – ability to identify personal strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities, clarify personal values and beliefs, and recognize personal worth and personal happiness;
- empathy;
- coping with emotions;
- coping with stress.

The additional areas in which a culturally sensitive approach is needed include:

- goal setting;
- assertiveness;
- negotiation skills

IMPACT OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION:

How to measure an intangible result like this clearly presents a serious problem. It is difficult to quantify the development of skills such as coping with stress or the development of interpersonal skills. A qualitative assessment must often be sufficient. In particular in developing countries where means and resources are often scarce, evaluation is difficult. Some general patterns, nevertheless, have emerged from the evaluations that have been undertaken in this field. Certain “factors of success” have been identified (World Health Organization, 1999, 2003). These include the need for:

- long-term programs;
- trained educators or providers;
- a focus on both generic and specific skills;
- developmentally appropriate inputs;
- active student involvement;
- links to other subjects;
- user-friendly materials;
- peer leadership components.

Where these factors have been implemented, life skills programs contributed to a decrease in

alcohol misuse, drug abuse, smoking, delinquency, violence, and suicide and to an improvement in pro-social behavior . Other findings suggest a positive impact on mental health in relation to self-image, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social and emotional adjustment and a decrease in social anxiety. School performance has been shown to improve with regard to behavior, academic achievement, and absenteeism..In general life skills development, there have been reported signs of improvement in problem solving, communication, and coping skills..

IDENTIFICATION OF LIFE SKILLS

UNICEF states "there is no definitive list" of life skills but enumerates many "psychosocial and interpersonal skills generally considered important." It asserts life skills are a synthesis: "many skills are used simultaneously in practice. Life skills can vary from financial literacy, substance abuse prevention, to therapeutic techniques to deal with disabilities, such as autism.

They are various types of life skills which have been identified by agencies such as WHO, UNICEF etc. Any life skills education programme has two parts i.e. information and, skill development. There are ten core life skills, which have been identified. World Health Organization (WHO) has categorized them into three components. These are social or interpersonal skills, cognitive skills and emotional coping skills. Life skills fall into three basic categories, which complement and reinforce each other.

Social skills	Cognitive skills	Emotional coping skills
Communication skills	Decision-making and problem-solving	Managing stress
Negotiation and refusal skills	Understanding consequences of actions	the Managing feelings, including anger
Assertiveness skills	Determining alternative solutions to problems	Skills for increasing self- management and self- monitoring
Interpersonal skills (for developing healthy relationships)	Critical thinking	
Cooperation skills	Analysing peer and media influences	

Analysing one's perceptions
Empathy/understanding of social norms and beliefs
and perception Self evaluation and values
clarification

Let us now understand meaning of each life skill in detail.

(a) Critical thinking skills/Decision-making skills:

(i) Decision making skills: Decision-making is a process to determine alternative and constructive solutions about problems.

(ii) Critical thinking skill: Critical thinking skill is an ability which helps to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. It also helps us to evaluate the influence of decisions taken on our own values and values of people who are near to us. Adolescents are most of the time influenced by media and peers. This skill can assist them to assess the pros and cons of the situation and help them to evaluate their actions.

(iii) Problem solving skill: It is an ability to identify the problems correctly, understanding its sources and causes very constructively. These causes have to be reduced or eliminated. This skill also assists in choosing the best alternative from many to solve the problem.

(b) Interpersonal/Communication skills

(i) Effective communication: Communication is an important process which is used by an individual to transfer ideas, information or feelings to others. Unless the communication is effective, the purpose of communication fails. Effective communication skill helps to express oneself both verbally and non-verbally through gestures, in way that messages are not distorted and, moreover, it is appropriate to one's culture and situation. Therefore, effective communication includes active listening, ability to express feelings and giving appropriate feedback.

(ii) Negotiation/refusal skill: Sometimes, an individual is put in a situation, where he/she does not want to remain for a long time. This induces lot of dissatisfaction in an individual. For example, a child is bullied or abused by his/her classmates. This can put him/her in a state of depression or detachment. Then, negotiation skill will help that child to negotiate, without getting aggressive towards them and thus helping him/her to become more acceptable.

(iii) Empathy: It is an ability to imagine and understand what life is like for another person, even in a situation that you may not be familiar with. It is important for an adolescent to

develop positive outlook towards others and feeling of cooperation, which is necessary for preparing the foundation for adulthood.

(iv) Interpersonal skill: The skill which is required to co-ordinate work with the involvement of the people is called Interpersonal skill. This skill helps an individual to relate in a positive way with fellow beings. Development of this skill enables an individual/adolescent to be accepted in the society. He/she also develops the acceptance of social norms, which is essential to prevent an individual to follow delinquent behaviour.

(c) Coping and self-management skills

(i) Coping with stress/stress management: Adolescence is a vulnerable period of development and rapid developmental changes causes stress. Erickson has propounded that in this period individual wants to have his/her own identity. If proper direction is not given then he/she feels stressed out. Therefore, this skill helps in recognising the sources of life stress and directs an individual to choose a way that can control the heightened stress level.

(ii) Coping with emotions: Briggs concluded that emotional development is complete by the age of 2 years. The adolescent generally shows heightened emotions as compared to an adult and we end up in concluding that this group is immature. This skill is involved in recognising the emotions and also helps to respond to those emotions appropriately. Since, emotions also influence the overt behaviour, the skill becomes more important for the constructive personality development.

(iii) Skill of self evaluation/self awareness: This skill includes the recognition of one's self esteem, internal locus of control, likes and dislikes

IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS:

1. Life skills help individuals to transit successfully from childhood to adulthood by healthy development of social and emotional skills.
2. It helps in the development of social competence and problem solving skills, which in turn help adolescents/ individuals to form their own identity.
3. It helps to weigh pros and cons of the situation, hence, act as a mediator to problem behaviour.
4. It promotes positive social, norms that an impact the adolescent health services, schools and family.
5. It helps individuals to differentiate between hearing and listening and thus, ensuring less development misconceptions or miscommunications regarding issues such as drugs, alcoholism etc.

6. It delays the onset of the abuse of tobacco, alcohol etc.
7. It promotes the development of positive self-esteem and teaches anger control.

CONCLUSION:

Skills basically involve vocational skills, business management skills etc, where as life skills encompasses all the dimensions of human life, be it economical, social or psychological. Life skills are behaviors used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs .Therefore, life skills are a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills, which can help people, to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life.

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