

LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN INDIA AND ITS RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE

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Abstract

Students are considered to be the productive members of a society due to their physical and intellectual capacity. But unfortunately most of the Students are unable to utilize their potential to maximum due to inappropriate environment. They are always engaging in antisocial activities and spoiling their life. To make life of Students valuable and to convert them to individuals with high potential, educational system should be reformed giving due importance to life skill education. Life skills are those abilities which will help in the promotion of general well-being and psychosocial competence of the individual. Life skills empower young people to take positive action to protect them and promote health and positive social relationships. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others. In the present paper the investigator goes through the importance of life skills, various life skills, life skill education and the benefits imparting life skill education in our education system.

Key words : Life skill, life skill education, Students, relevance, training

Introduction:

The goals of education, and of a school, indisputably include building cognitive abilities such as reading and math. Increasingly, however, it also implies that children should be equipped with other abilities that allow them to succeed in and contribute to the society they live in. We will broadly call such traits – such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, self-management, decision-making, and perseverance - life skills. This note aims to synthesize and contribute to the growing discussion around the development of life skills education in India. We propose that life skills should be explicitly woven into school education by exploring evidence on why such skills matter and which skills are important for learning and future outcomes. The following sections then review how these skills are typically nurtured in or out of schools and how feasible these interventions may be. We conclude by analyzing present opportunities for building the scope of life skills education in policy and practice in India.

Defining Life Skills:

Life skills may be viewed as a range of psycho-social and cognitive abilities that equip children to make informed decisions and choices, manage their emotional well-being and communicate effectively. Efforts to address the achievement gap have typically focused on core subjects. A common belief is that life skills are optional and secondary to achieving basic literacy and numeracy only if resources are available. Research, however, unequivocally shows that students who develop social-emotional skills and academic mindsets are better equipped to succeed in school and are able to transfer theoretical concepts to real-life situations early on.

Life Skills Education Policies in India:

An effective life skills approach is driven by multiple aspects:

Programme content: developing relevant information, attitudes, and skills

Mechanisms : Implementing participatory teaching practices, modelling of skills and reinforcement

Teacher training : Building teacher's belief the potential of life skills education and their capacity to impart such skills

Commitment : Advocating for the integration of life skills education in school curriculum

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has emphasised on constructive learning experiences, and on the development of an inquiry-based approach, work-related knowledge and broader life skills. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in 2005, introduced life skills education as an integral part of the curricula through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes 6 to 10 and has developed life skills manuals for teachers teaching classes 6, 7 and 8. These manuals provide teachers broad guidelines for each of the ten core life skills identified by WHO. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also has, under its agenda, life skills training focusing on upper primary girls. While there have been dispersed efforts around life skills¹⁷, focus on curriculum integration and teacher development remains poor.¹⁸ Most of these efforts take a general approach to 'life skills information delivery' without a particular context. There are certain difficulties in successfully integrating life skills in Indian school education without systemic reform: Moving life skills from the margins to the centre of schooling and creating multiple learning opportunities or reinforcement within schools.

Introducing a learner-centric pedagogy, not solely reliant on rote learning or exam-based assessment Building a school culture toward life-skills based education Improving the capacity and motivation of teachers to develop and integrate such life skills into their classroom practice Life skills education in schools clearly needs to take place in the context of broader education system reforms. To be effective, life skills ultimately need to be age-aligned, and inculcated in schools that

are inclusive, with trained and motivated teachers who can employ participatory and experiential teaching practices.

Mechanisms to build Life Skills : Various mediums have been employed to inculcate life skills or 21st century skills such as sport, drama and fine arts, storytelling, experiential workshops, mentoring initiatives, interactive classroom learning and discussion. There have been multiple innovations in the delivery of life skills in recent times, through games and simulations, experiential activities, and technology.

In India and globally, many approaches to deliver life skills education have also been incorporated within other skill development activities. A collaborative approach of this nature can often secure greater buy-in from different stakeholders, from policy makers to funders, as it may be viewed as producing more tangible outcomes. Some of these include:

Life skills and employment : Life skills are imparted as part of training programmes building secondary school students' employability skills. Along with investing in technical skills, such programmes address skills and mind-sets such as taking responsibility, adaptability, entrepreneurship, effective communication, decision-making, leadership and teamwork. The aim is to equip children with technical knowledge as well as the soft skills required to succeed in the workplace, thereby directly translating their education into a source of livelihood. Examples in India include In Open (life skills education as part of computer literacy programmes), IGNIS Careers (English language learning), Medha (soft skills for the workplace), and Lend A Hand India (vocational education).

Life skills and values education: Existing policy in India, by a large measure, tends to focus on inculcating such skills through values-based education. However, unless well implemented, such approaches may be very prescriptive in nature and seen as an add-on to existing syllabus pressure. Examples of schools that have integrated holistic development as part of their pedagogy include the Don Bosco school network. Early childhood interventions lay strong foundations for children during the most critical development phase of their lives, i.e., from ages 3 to 6 years.. In addition to developing resources and practices for educators and parents to foster learning mind-sets. 21st century skills are embedded throughout all school activities using the create employability skills framework.

Life skills and child rights: Within India, there are several interventions that work on building life skills as part of a larger programme of child rights and empowerment. Such organisations address target mind-sets and abilities such as self-awareness, leadership, and social influence, through their broader goals of tackling gender disparity, violence, health, etc. Examples in India include Educate

Girls.

Higher order thinking skills: Many life skills programmes are increasingly catering to imparting 21st century skills. Such programmes, which have accelerated in light of increasing advocacy for a shift from rote learning, support inquiry-based learning by building critical thinking and creative problem solving skills.

Teacher Development: The efficacy of a life skills intervention is heavily driven by the capabilities and attitudes of the teacher implementing it. Ensuring adequate training for teachers and other educators is, therefore, a key factor contributing to the effectiveness of life skills education. Certain factors must be considered in the design of training programmes that help teachers incorporate soft skills into practice. Such capacity-building should explicitly provide opportunities for teachers to self-assess their own attitudes, values, and life skills proficiency, which strongly influence how they teach such skills to children. Teacher development has to allow for the practice and internalisation of these skills, without which there will be a natural tendency to fall back upon familiar information-delivery teaching methods. In addition to content knowledge, training must help build confidence and allow teachers to become more comfortable with life skills and build better relationships with their students. Given several challenges in our education system, it is still worth noting that teachers may be trained faster than systems can be reformed. A trained teacher can still play a positive role and embed soft skills into their daily teaching practice, particularly when education systems are weak. Addressing teacher capacity can involve the development of life skills courses or modules in pre-service teacher training, on-going and sustained block- or district-level in-service support systems, and teacher self-assessment tools.

Challenges

Definition and understanding of life skills: A more effective approach towards life skills first requires understanding and articulating them better. Life skills, as a concept, can be broad and multifaceted, and life skills initiatives can therefore include a wide range of goals, content and approaches. Life skills, as defined by WHO, are “innumerable, and the nature and definition of life skills are likely to differ across cultures and settings”. This broad definition is, however, insufficient for practical applications or for effective policy-making. To our knowledge, a list of life skills that is age-level appropriate and practically applicable has not been developed. This ambiguity hinders the both the effective design of life skills interventions, and the development of metrics to measure them. It is challenging for a life skills intervention to identify which skills to target, which age group to target and which activities/delivery models might be optimal.

Limited life skills evidence in developing countries’ context: While there is plenty of

evidence on the effectiveness of interventions aiming to improve school-based academic skills, there is much less documentation and research on sustained life skills interventions, especially in India and other developing countries.

Evaluation of impact: The assessment of life skills remains a huge challenge. Even globally, there is little clear guidance as to if and how life skills assessments can be integrated systematically into national assessment systems (including school-based assessments), in line with the increasing integration of life skills education into national curriculum frameworks and education systems. This absence of a common language to gauge success makes it difficult to develop applicable classroom life skills practices, attract funders, and understand which interventions are relatively more effective.

Prescriptive approach: Life skills education in India is often confused with values education. Most schools have values education as part of the curriculum, being one of the requirements of the NCF. This approach, however, is typically very prescriptive and information-driven instead of practical building of targeted skills, attitudes and knowledge in children.

Teacher mind-set and professional development: Given the traditional approach to teaching and learning in the country, the pedagogy required for effective life skills education is difficult for individual teachers to develop and apply in their practice. In the teaching of life skills, there is a risk that teachers in the country are inadequately equipped in their own knowledge, attitudes and skills to teach effectively and with confidence. Today, teacher training does not place adequate emphasis on non-academic factors, and supportive professional development opportunities are limited. Central Square Foundation Life Skills Education in India clarify about which skills should be taught as life skills, why these skills are chosen, and how they should be taught.

Scale and quality dilution: Given the importance of the teacher or facilitator in any effective life skills education intervention, any attempt to scale such a programme can result in a dilution of quality in the absence of effectively trained teachers. Moreover, most life skills models we have analysed in India are very hands-on and resource-intensive and typically reach smaller numbers of children. Effectively taking such models to more children will prove challenging.

Potential Opportunities

Identifying and funding innovations: With life skills education in India gaining traction, numerous entrepreneurs are innovating and developing their own approaches to life skills delivery. This provides funders an opportunity to understand development of an effective life skills approach and how it can potentially mature and scale-up from an informal after-school programme to school-linked out-of-school programmed, to a formal in-school model and teacher training.

Promote development of an evidence base for life skills education in India: Evidence on the

effectiveness of life skills approaches in India and their future impact is minimal.

CONCLUSION

Life Skills Education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychological skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way: it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and protection of Human Rights. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control. Life skill education and training will help the teacher educators to use their knowledge, attitude and values in a better useful way to develop the positive behaviour. It helps to identify their 'capacity', increase the 'capability' and achieve 'competency' in their endeavour of teaching profession.

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