

IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILL EDUCATION AND TEACHING METHODS

Dr. Pradeep Kumar S.L
Associate Professor
N.S.S Training College
Changanacherry

Abstract:

Life skills help individuals to deal with rapid changes brought about by modernization. Life skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, the ability to communicate and collaborate, along with personal and social responsibility that contribute to become both a good citizen as well as a successful person. Life skills training equips people with the social and interpersonal skills that enable them to meet the challenges of daily life in an effective way. The life skills approach aims at assisting children to gain new ways of learning as well as control over their behaviour and to take informed decisions that can lead to gain positive values in life. Teaching life skills to young people prevents maladjustment and enhances human potential in discovering personal capacities. Discussion, Debate, Brainstorming, Role Play, Story-telling, Songs, Field trips, Social work are some of the major methods which are useful in developing Life skills in students. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of Life skills in their wards. Professional training in imparting Life skill education to practicing teachers is the need of the hour.

Key terms: Life skills, Positive behaviour, thematic approach, resilience, brainstorming, field trip

Life skills are defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Life skills also known as psychosocial competency are basic skills acquired through learning or through life experience. Life skills help people to manage and live better by effectively handling issues and problems encountered in everyday life.

Life skills are the set of intra and inter personal skills that an individual need to interact confidently, freely and effectively with other people and with local community at large. They play an important role and aid in taking important decisions in one’s life, help in solving the problems in all levels of personal, social and sexual life. They have an important role in self-development and improving inter personal skills. Life skills help to deal with others positively and to avoid falling in to crises, and to overcome them when they occur.

Life skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, the ability to communicate and collaborate, along with personal and social responsibility that contribute to become both a good citizen as well as a successful person. Life skills training equips people with the social and interpersonal skills that enable them to meet the challenges of daily life effectively. The objectives of this training are to develop self-confidence, encourage critical thinking, foster independence, communicate effectively and learning to handle stress.

Life skills training helps people to communicate with the outside world effectively and to maintain a better relationship with family and friends. Persons who have undergone life skills training are less likely to be exploited by others as they will be physically and emotionally self-reliant. They will be more assertive and confident and are more likely to enjoy nurturing relationships by being able to express their feelings and communicate with others. They will be better equipped to make rational decisions which will benefit them and others.

The dramatic changes across the Globe over the past few years have resulted in technology transformations which have impact on education, workplace and home life. To cope up with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need new life skills to develop the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Students need to be trained to effectively discharge their duties in their future jobs which are associated with work pressure and requires flexibility. The development of life skills helps students to develop thinking and problem-solving abilities, to recognize the impact of their actions and teaches them to take responsibility for their actions rather than blaming others. They help to develop confidence in students by improving spoken and group collaboration skills, decision making skills and to analyze options which help them to lead a better life. They also help in developing a greater sense of self-awareness and appreciation for others.

Facilitation of learning of Life skills is a major component of programmes designed to promote healthy behavior and holistic well-being among students. Life skills education should include teaching of information related to health, hygiene, environment along with promotion of positive attitudes and values. The development of life skills needs modelling of life skills by teachers and a supportive classroom environment should be provided for learning. Life skills education needs to be developed as part of a whole instructional initiative designed to support the healthy psychological development of students. Life skills can be operationalized through content, thematic or activity approach. Content approach focuses on information for increasing knowledge related to specific subject areas. In thematic approach, appropriate themes for the target group are built into the sessions.

Benefits of Life skills Education

Social Benefits

Life skills education promotes pro-social behavior, improves the inter personal relationships thereby to live better in the society.

Cultural Benefits

Life skills education is very important to young people growing up in multicultural societies. The students need to be aware about the different cultures to have a proper understanding about the society.

Economic Benefits

Life skills education, and the skills promoted are highly valued by the future employers. The health and social problems prevalent today have at their root a component of human behavior. Imparting life skills education in early stage will help in early prevention of bad habits thereby earning economic benefits.

Steps for developing Life skills in Students

Skills such as resilience, communication, proactivity and leadership are some of the areas that are essential for facing the challenges of life. Equipping the students with the skills they need to develop to meet the unseen future challenges is a significant task and the following steps will be very useful in developing life skills in students.

1. Teach the importance of collaboration

Students need to develop skills which will make them ready to collaborate with others, not only in their own classroom or workplace but also with the society at large. This can be developed by encouraging students to work together on a creative challenge, and allowing them to reflect and discuss about the knowledge that they gained from the activity. This will help them understand better the importance of being part of an increasingly collaborative and connected society.

2. Build on evaluation and analysis

Information dissemination is very fast and the information available may not be accurate or complete. Students need to develop the skills to find accurate information and to critically analyse its reliability and usefulness. Incorporating research-based projects in teaching- learning process will help in developing this essential skill.

3. Teach tolerance and resilience

These skills can be developed by exposing the students to open discussions and experiences and thereby making them feel comfortable while communicating with each other. School and College trips, debating sessions, visits to nearby Offices and work places etc. will help the students to understand different cultures and create the ability to communicate with openness. These activities will help them to develop tolerance and resilience.

4. Help students learn through their strengths

It is very important to identify the strength and weakness of students. Different strategies have to be adopted as one size does not fit all when it comes to development of students. All students are born with different strengths, and it is essential to identify and develop the strengths identified. It will be challenging to frame

the curriculum for each individual, but it will be possible to start to pinpoint elements of the classes which will appeal to particular students' strengths and interests.

5. Use learning beyond the classroom

It will be easier for students to retain and retrieve the information taught in the classroom, if they learn repeatedly in different and personally meaningful ways. It will help them better understand the importance of certain skills in their everyday life and future lives. Opportunities should be provided for students to "transfer" school learning to real-life situations. For example, while solving a problem, students should be asked to approach the scenario in such a way that it has happened to them, and the steps they would go through to solve it. The skills needed for success in the future will go far beyond the context of a traditionally drafted system.

Teachers should assist the students to make personal connections and make them understand the meaning of the new material and thereby integrating these learning with what they already know. Facilitating the transfer of knowledge and skills to real-life situations is important. Students should be encouraged to think and ask questions when they don't understand. Teaching students to work co-operatively, reflect on their classroom experiences and making them share with peers, teachers and parents are also very useful.

Placing more responsibilities on students

Students should be given more responsibilities as they grow up is important. These responsibilities include leadership roles in school, student voice, higher-level thinking skills and greater control over personal and academic goal setting.

More emphasize on life skills from the teacher

The educators are not only responsible for the academic achievement of their students, but are also caregivers, who provide nurturing, positive relationships to the students. Educators need to engage students fully in the learning process. The curriculum should emphasize on relevance of learning life skills to the students. Thrust should be given for activity-based learning which is project-based and/or performance-based to develop life skills.

Inculcating 'growth mindset'

Teachers need to inculcate "growth mindset" in students to develop life skills. When the teacher inculcates this as a practice students start to enjoy learning. They understand that progress takes time and they keep trying until they succeed. This will help them achieve success in any area as they grow. The students will develop the habit of asking for help and will be ready to put in efforts to take up new challenges. They will not be afraid of failures and will develop the mindset to view mistakes as opportunities.

Teaching – Learning Process

Life skills education involves dynamic teaching-learning process. Teachers should sensitize learners to understand importance of life skills. Life skills can be developed by providing proper training and experience. Learners should be encouraged to explore and investigate facts, analyze situations critically and present themselves in a creative manner supported by human values. Expertise in different life skills helps the student to become an integrated human being.

Teachers should provide a homely learning environment and ensure better student involvement in transaction process. Teachers should initiate joyful and comfortable learning culture for developing different life skills like self-awareness, problem solving, decision making, creative thinking, critical thinking and other essential life skills. Some of the points that teachers need to consider while imparting different life skills among learners are given below:

Encourage two way communication and group discussion

Two way communication helps students in active learning. When a teacher asks a question to his students, students reflect on the relevant answer and participate in learning. Teachers will be able to correct and guide students on the spot. Group discussion will encourage students to share their views, ideas and concepts with their peers comfortably and it helps to boost confidence among students.

Focus more on process than product

Teachers should focus more on process than product. Positive learning outcomes have a lifelong experience. Teachers should facilitate students to develop a positive attitude towards life circumstances.

Methods of imparting Life Skill Education

Discussion

Debate

Brainstorming

Role Play

Story telling

Songs

Field trips

Social work

Discussion

Discussion is a purposeful conversational activity leading to a particular objective. It involves exchange and sharing of ideas, experiences, facts and opinion on particular topics. Discussion can be used when clarifying

attitudes, concepts, gathering opinion from others, for getting ideas. Teacher has to divide the class into small groups depending on the size of the class and change the sitting arrangements. After the discussion is over, teacher has to provide opportunity to group leader to present his/her views. Teacher has to moderate the discussion and summarize the topic.

Debates

Debate is a discussion that involves two opposite groups with each group expressing opinions on a given topic. Each group try to win the other group. At the end of the debating session, the group with more points is declared as the winner. Whenever the teacher use debate, correct misunderstandings and explain views presented in the debate. This assists students to arrive a conclusion as per the intended objective.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a free expression of ideas among participating students on a given problem. During Brainstorming sessions the teacher has to ensure that all students' contributions are valued and accepted. Teacher has to encourage more participants to express their views. At the end of Brainstorming session, let the participants to evaluate the ideas together based on the criteria given. Teacher has to guide the participants on selecting ideas relevant to acquisition of the appropriate life skills.

Role Plays

Role Plays are short drama like episodes in which participants experience how a person feels in a similar real life situation. Role Plays are very useful in developing skills such as negotiation, assertiveness, communication, co-operation, compassion, self-awareness and self-confidence. Role Plays are very useful in discussing sensitive issues like gender, which the teacher may feel uncomfortable to handle. Role Plays are also useful in clarifying new and unfamiliar concepts and in demonstrating how a skill can be applied in a particular situation.

Story telling

Story telling involve telling of narratives with particular theme. Students are provided with detailed information regarding an event or life situation in an interesting way, and still the teacher passes a moral message to students. Stories can be composed or collected based on particular themes on life skills like negotiation, decision making etc. when telling stories teacher should try his/her maximum to present it in a dramatic and interesting way.

Songs

Songs are musical compositions and they may convey messages on contemporary issues in Society. They can be used in character building and strengthen life skills like self-awareness, conflict resolution, compassion, co-operation etc. songs are useful when one wants to convey sensitive messages in an interesting way.

Teacher can recite famous songs, or frame his/her songs and even ask students to compose songs on themes given by the teacher. The song selected by the teacher should be interesting, appealing and easy to learn.

Field trips

Teachers can organize field trips for their students to visit various places like places of historic importance, cultural importance, local body offices, old age homes, orphanages, laboratories factories, Banks etc. related to different topics to gain knowledge and experience.

Social work

Social work is another activity which help learners to acquire essential life skills. It integrates different life skills like decision making, interpersonal, intrapersonal, creative thinking, critical thinking etc. Students develop effective communication skills while performing various field works.

Strategies that teacher can adopt in developing life skills among learners:

Effective school health programmes should be organized that follow the newly evolved framework for skill-based health education that would enable students to acquire the requisite knowledge and develop attitudes, values and life skills needed to lead an adjusted life and to avoid health related risks.

Co-ordinated school-community programmes that increase access to information, resources and services at places and times and in the manner that are likely to be appealing and acceptable to learners who do not attend school as well as those who do, including peer education, distance learning and other innovative ways of learning.

School syllabi and textbooks have to be reviewed to identify the scope of life skills needed material for facilitating effective integration of the skills with the entire educative process. Textbook writers, teacher educators and other concerned stakeholders can also make great contribution.

Co-curricular activities – Teacher can organize co-curricular activities, quiz competitions, group discussion, role play, case study, essay competition, painting/poster competition, symposium, poetic recitation, etc., that may prove very effective in not only providing accurate and adequate information to students but also developing in them positive attitude and responsible behaviour.

Interactive and innovative methods – for developing life skills, the traditional method may not be sufficient. Life skills can be developed using pedagogical methods whereas reproductive health is to be focused so that youngsters can cope with stress and peer pressure etc. Methods developing interpersonal skills and positive

attitudes should be preferred. Special emphasis should be given on experimental learning. Students are to be engaged in a dynamic teaching-learning process so that the learning leads to an active acquisition and processing of experiences.

Conclusion

Life skills education is facilitated by the use of participatory learning methods and approaches which are based on social learning process and includes hearing and understanding an explanation of the skills, observation of the skill and practice of the skills in a supportive learning environment and feedback about individual performance of different life skills. Practice of skills is facilitated by Role-playing in typical scenarios, with a focus on the application of skills and the effect that they have on the outcome of a hypothetical situation. Skill learning is also facilitated by using learning tools, e.g. by working through different phases in the decision-making process. Different combination of the life skills are emphasized depending on the purpose and topic.

Life Skills education should be designed to enable students to practice skills progressively in more demanding situations, for example, by starting with skills learning in non-threatening, low-risk, normal everyday situations and progressively moving on to the application of skills in difficult, threatening and high-risk situations. The effective introduction and firm placement of life skills education requires faculty training to promote effective implementation of the programme. This can be provided as in-service training and efforts should be made to introduce it in in-service teacher training institutions. The successful implementation of Life Skills programmes highly depends on faculty training and continued support of teachers.

Reference

- Surowiecki J. (2004), *The Wisdom of Crowd*. New York: Anchor.
- Pink D.H. (2005), *A Whole New Mind*. New York :Riverhead
- Robinson K. (2001), *Out of Our Minds: Learning to Be Creative*. Los Angeles: Wiley- Capstone.
- Paul, Richard and Linda Elder, (2006) "Critical Thinking, The nature of Critical and Creative Thought", *Journal of Developmental education* 30 (2), 34-35.
- Life skills education, by Margaret Francis.in 'Changing minds.org'http://changingminds.org/articles/articles/life_skills_education.htm
- Life skills education in schools, programme on mental health by WHO http://www.asksourc.info/pdf/31181_lifeskillsed_1994.pdf |
- Huntington, S. "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3): pp. 22–49. |
- UNICEF National Focus Group Position Papers, NCERT. *Teacher Commitment* , NCERT |
- United Nations Millennium Declaration (Sept 18,2000) : Resolution adopted By the General Assembly |
- Handbook for Teachers and Parents, YVUA School Life Skills Program. New Delhi |
- Singh, Harshvardhan. (Sept26, 2013).Role of Education Systems in Meeting Employer's Needs for Skills.