

IMPORTANCE AND NEED OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Payal Gupta

Assistant Professor, Department of B.Ed.,
Shri Jai Narain P.G. College (KKC),
Lucknow 226012 (India)
E-mail id-payal.jndc@gmail.com

In today's world things are changing at a very fast pace and complexity of life is increasing day by day. The classroom education alone does not contribute completely to solve these problems; it needs comprehensive and multi strategic approaches to empower the psycho social competency of individuals. In this connection life skill education can play a vital role in helping students to lead a healthy and productive life and to contribute positively to the society. This paper throws light on the importance of life skills in schools.

Key words:

Life Skills, interpersonal relationship, empathy, self awareness, critical thinking, decision making, creative thinking, problem solving.

Development of life skills has been an integral part of our ancient Indian education system. Old Indian universities were known for imparting excellent knowledge and life skills. In modern age, education system of India has been affected by fast development and advancement. Competition, loneliness, anxiety, depression and materialistic life have affected the life of our students also. Most of the students are unable to utilize their potential. Aspiration of students is high and they want a quality education that will enable them to compete in every walk of life. Young people need a wide range of intra and interpersonal skills to face the complex situation of today's world. It is really disappointing that these life skills like self awareness, critical thinking, empathy, decision making, creative thinking, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress and emotions are often not covered in our education system. This issue should be addressed urgently.

World Health Organization (WHO) 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-Skills Education as defined by the UNICEF a behaviour change or behaviour development approach to address a balance of three areas; knowledge, attitude and skills.

There have been numerous researches carried out to emphasize the importance & effectiveness of life skills education in the development of students' social, emotional and cognitive development & dealing with their psychosocial problems and issues. Integrating life skills as part of education has some rationale. Life skills help individuals to deal with rapid changes brought about by modernization (Wanjama et al., 2006). Through Life Skills education, learners acquire and develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, stress and anxiety management, effective communication, self-esteem, assertiveness and empathy (Veena and Vivek, 2010). Researches show significant improvement in interpersonal relationship and reduction in aggression and behavioural problems (Smith & et al., (2004). Vranda and Rao (2011) proved that life skills training enhanced their psychosocial Competencies. Maladjustment among young people can be prevented by teaching life skills. This enhances human potential in discovering personal capacities (Castle, 1966).

A research on life skills programmes suggest, methods used can help to improve teacher and student relationships (Parsonset al.1988). Some researches show improvement in academic performance as a result of teaching life skills. Many positive effects can be seen such as improved school attendance, less bullying, fewer referrals to specialist support services and better relationships between children and their parents by acquiring life skills. Some researchers find in their research that life skills training have a positive effect and

improves social development, emotional and social adjustment, suggesting an increase in compatibility of children and public health Roodbari, Sahdipoor & Ghale (2013). Life skills are promoting psycho-social abilities and consequently they improve psycho-physical health. Education about life skills makes the individual able to improve his knowledge, develop values and views, meaning that the individual knows when and how to do a task. Life skills motivate healthy behaviour and increase self-confidence. Therefore, we can say that they have an important role in the prevention of psychological diseases and behavioural problems (Nori, 1998). Ramesh and Farshad C. (2004) in his research proved the effectiveness of like skills training in increasing mental and physical health, pro-social behaviour and decreasing in behavioural, social problems & self-destructive behaviours.

Life skills approach focuses on learner centered, youth-friendly, gender sensitive, interactive and participatory learning. (Rooth, 2000). The greater the number of skills that the learner has developed and has at his/her disposal, the better the alternatives and opportunities that are available with which the learner can equip him/herself in any field (Pigozzi, 2004). Life skills training enhance critical thinking abilities, which further impacts were living life actively, being responsible in the job and in future planning too. As the learner develops more life skills, he/she can handle problems better and can even avoid problems. Life skills lead to a positive behaviour and the strength of positive behaviour depends on the depth of the skill acquired by the individual. The total reflection of one's behaviour is the sum total of the appropriate combination of different skills. The most appropriate intervention for the promotion of the psychological competence of children in schools is by enhancing competencies through the optimum use of available resources by the process of life skills education and training (Nair, 2010). The life skills approach aims at assisting adolescents to gain new ways of learning as well as control over their behaviour and to take informed decision that can lead to positive values. Puspakumara (2011) in his study showed that life skills training was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence Bullying & to promote self-confidence and self-esteem among the adolescents.

The ten core life skills self awareness, critical thinking, empathy, decision making, creative thinking, problem solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress and emotions, laid down by WHO (1997) are equally necessary to be taught to students to help their successful transition from childhood to adulthood by development of social, intellectual and emotional skills.

Decision-making skills of an individual refer to his ability to choose the best course of action after carefully analyzing and examining the available options and the given circumstances. Decision making is an integral part of our personal as well as professional lives. Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives.

Problem solving skills refers to our ability to solve problems in an effective and timely manner without any impediments. Problem solving enables us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise.

Creative thinking is a way of looking at situations, problems, or any condition from a new perspective. It suggests unusual, unique, and unorthodox solutions. The solutions might look unsettling in the beginning. However, they prove to be one of the most fruitful in the end. Creative thinking contributes to both decision making and problem solving by enabling us to explore the available alternatives and various consequences of our actions or non-action. It helps us to look beyond our direct experience, and even if no problem is identified, or no decision is to be made, creative thinking can help us to respond adaptively and with flexibility to the situations of our daily lives.

Critical thinking is an ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking skill is opposite to creative thinking skill. It is the ability to make a difference between fake truth and real truth, judgement and opinion. It prepares a person to think rationally and prepare to build trust on right and to avoid wrong. School curriculum should incorporate strategies that require higher-level thinking skills such as inference, prediction, analysis and critical thinking. With the use of critical thinking strategies, students develop skills such as reasoning, questioning and investigating, observing and describing, comparing

and connecting, finding complexity, and exploring viewpoints. Problem solving is an important element of all content areas.

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 mean keeping good relations with family members, which are an important source of social support. It may also mean being able to end relationships constructively.

Self awareness enables one to understand one owns needs, desires, feelings, habits. The more an individual knows about themselves the better they are adapting life change that suits their needs. Self-awareness includes our recognition of ourselves, of our character, of our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes.

Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in a situation that we may not be familiar with. Empathy can help us to understand and accept others who may be very different from ourselves, which can improve social interactions. Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviour towards people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance.

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. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

Coping with emotions involves recognizing emotions in ourselves and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on our health if we do not react appropriately.

Coping with stress is about recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may mean that we take action to reduce the sources of stress. Or it may mean learning how to relax, so that tensions created by unavoidable stress do not give rise to health problem.

Students begin to develop their academic self-concepts and their feelings of competence and confidence as learners in the elementary years. Decision making, communication and life skills as well as character values are developed in students during this stage. The knowledge, attitudes and skills that students acquire in the areas of academic, career and personal/social development during these elementary years serve as the foundation for future success in their school and community and prepare them to be effective human being.

Teachers should motivate the students to transfer the knowledge and skills to real-life situations. It is important to encourage children to think and ask questions. They should also encourage them in setting personal goals and guiding them in the achievement of these goals. Teachers should motivate students to learn the value of routines and schedules and the importance of following them. Students should be encouraged to work in cooperative manner. It is essential to provide more responsibilities on students as they mature. They should be given responsibilities such as leadership, student voice, and higher-level thinking skills.

Students should be actively involved in decision-making situations. Confidence in speaking, discussion, debate, writing, and problem solving provide a good start to providing a foundation for acquiring the skills. It helps them to become independent in their own learning. Teachers should play the role of facilitators and guide.

Making connections, constructing knowledge by building on prior knowledge and involving students in meaningful tasks that relate to real life should be the basis of curriculum. Organizational, collaborative and time management skills can be developed among students by involving children in projects and practical work. The curriculum should emphasize on relevance of the learning to the students. Activity-based learning

is often project-based and/or performance-based giving purpose to the work of the students. Different activities that can be used to enhance Life Skills in the academic institutions are as follows: discussions, brainstorming, role plays, educational games and simulations, analysis of situation and case studies, miming, poetry, story-telling, debates etc. Teacher should make the method experiential by involving the learners. He must be creative and innovative to come up with other relevant methods and activities and make use of the local environment. They can use combination methods in teaching Life Skills Education and chosen method should be appropriate to the learners.

In today's world when things are changing at a very fast pace. It is very important for children to be prepared for ever-changing future. To be able to adapt to new situations, work collaboratively, think out of the box, use failures as learning milestones are important skills the learners should have to succeed in future. Schools should provide an environment where students can develop the ability to see relationships between subjects, content and skills as well as between school and life outside of the classroom. We should integrate life skill development with normal curriculum rather than consider it as a non-curricular activity. Gradually the acceptance of participatory learning will get momentum and our students can lead a healthy life.

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