

Status of Life-Skill Education and Its Practices in India

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Abstract

This paper deals with the aim n objectives of education, and of a school, it indisputably include building cognitive abilities such as reading and Maths. Increasingly, however, it also implies that children should be equipped with other abilities that prepare them for success and meaningful contribution to the society they live in. These are broadly called by following traits—such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, self-awareness, decision-making, problem solving, empathy, interpersonal relationship, coping with stress and coping with emotion- life skills. This note aims to synthesise and contribute to the growing discussion around the development of life skills education in India. It is proposed that life skills should be explicitly woven into school education/training 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. It is concluded by analysing present opportunities for building the scope of life skills education in policy and practice in India.

Keywords

Life-skills, Self-awareness, Decision-making, Empathy, Critical thinking.

I. Introduction

Life skills have been 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” [1]. They actually signify the psycho-social skills that resolve around valued behaviour and include reflective skills like problem-solving, critical thinking. These also include personal skills like self-awareness and interpersonal skills like keeping effective communication, maintaining healthy relationship with others. Practice of life skills can bring qualities like self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, action competencies to the contemporary secondary school students and can generate enough capabilities among them to have the freedom to decide what to do in a special situation. Health and livelihood education can balance life skills education and vice versa.

WHO pointed ten core life skills which include [2] : a) self-

awareness b) empathy c) critical thinking d) creative thinking e) decision making f) problem solving g) effective communication h) interpersonal relationship i) coping with stress j) coping with emotion. Inclusion of Life Skill Education in the secondary teacher education curriculum is now a global trend. At present Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) has played an important role in child development and health promotion throughout the world. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion acknowledged life skills as an important factor of making better health choices [3]. To ensure fullest potential of children the United Nations in Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) [4] associated life skills with education. In 1990, Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) also pointed out life skills as essential learning tools for better survival, better aptitude development and a better life. In Dakar World Education Conference (2000) too, education was considered as an agent which can promote learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Life skill was identified as one of the six goals of EFA. Secondary level students in the region are largely featured with adolescence, a vital stage of growth and development, which is characterized by rapid psychological changes, psychological maturation, abstract thinking, risk taking mentality and sexual activities. Teachers can play a pivotal role in shaping personality of the students to the right direction by providing necessary guidance and counseling and suggest them to adopt some necessary life skills.

II. Life Skills Education Policies in India

An effective life skills approach is driven by multiple aspects:

- 1. Programme Content:** Developing relevant information, attitudes, and skills.
- 2. Mechanisms:** Implementing participatory teaching practices, modeling of skills and reinforcement.
- 3. Teacher Training:** Building teachers’ belief in the potential of and capacity in delivery of life skills education.
- 4. Commitment:** Advocating for the integration of life skills education in school curriculum.

Table 1 below applies UNICEF’s framework for national life skills delivery, allowing us to analyse the status of life skills education policy and practice in India.

Table 1: UNICEF analytical framework for national life skills delivery [5]

Question	How to Know	What to do
Are life skills included in the curriculum (formal, informal)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum documents • clearly articulate life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design curriculum emphasis with life skills
Is life skills education delivered as a whole-school approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of head teachers • Combination of classroom & extracurricular activities • School based assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration with school environment and culture strategies (at a district level, if feasible) • Enhancing support and training for head teachers • Identifying and developing tools for school-based assessments

Does the life skills programme/curriculum include relevant assessment strategies ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formative and Summative Classroom and school based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support to the integration of life skills education into supervision and inspection systems Support relevant forms of assessment for knowledge
Is there publically available data about the relevant behaviours (national/regional data)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National data sets Baseline data sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a baseline
Are there criteria for selecting life skills teachers / facilitators?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified qualities and professional needs and experience for life skills education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with partners to identify characteristics required and develop job descriptions where appropriate
Do teachers have adequate support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems for mentoring, supervision, etc. In-service training School head teachers have a role in support School head teachers have a role in support + systems for mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the integration of life skills education into supervision and inspection systems Integrate life skills education into career structures and support systems Review the effectiveness of existing in-service and pre-service training provision against the needs of life skills education teachers
Are resources needed in place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools have materials to teach life skills education Factual references Activity modules, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop capacity of national partners in life skills education material development Support resource budgets for life skills education
Does it address pre-service teacher education for all teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any life skills education in pre-service teacher training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with providers and pre-service curriculum

III. Current Status of Life Skills Education in India

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 [6] 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 curriculum through Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) for classes 6 to 10 and 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 for girls in on upper primary classes.

While there have been dispersed efforts around life skills, focus on curriculum integration and teacher development remains poor. Many of these efforts take a general approach to ‘life skills information delivery’ (sometimes more as moral/values education) 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 (i.e. extracurricular or as passive ‘values education’) 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.

Enabling Context/System Alignment	Absent (no or limited progress)	Emerging (on way to meeting minimum standard)	Established (acceptable minimum standard)	Advanced
Policies (System-level documents that provide guidelines for life skills education)				
Curriculum (Curricular modules designed and developed for teacher/ teacher educator/student use)				
Learning/Quality Goals (Mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of life skills delivery)				

Contextual Evidence Body (Evidence base on impact of life skills education interventions in the Indian context)				
Funding (Funding allocated for life skills purposes as part of education policy)				
Pre-service + In-service Teacher Training (Provision of preparatory and on-going professional development to teachers to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in inculcating such skills)				

IV. Challenges

- Definition and understanding of life skills.
- Limited life skills evidence in developing countries context.
- Evaluation of impact.
- Prescriptive approach.
- Teacher mindset and professional development.

V. Potential Opportunities

- Identifying and funding innovations.
- Promote development of an evidence base for life skills education in India.
- Convene entrepreneurs and practitioners.
- Promote research on the measurement of life skills.

References

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