

Life-Skills Education of Adolescents: Challenges and Issues

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Abstract: Life skills can be best understood as the abilities for positive and adaptive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with day-to-day needs and challenges. Major life skills include problem solving, decision-making, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, self-awareness, and coping with stress and emotions. These life-skills have further been clustered as thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. Adolescence is the period of human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life-span and is marked by a tremendous pace of physical and psychological human development. Life-skills are a vast group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills that are needed for every individual to lead a healthy and productive life. These are the skills that help promote mental wellbeing and competence in young people. Adolescence is considered a period of stress and storm in which teenagers go through different physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes. In this period, teaching life skills education is very important for adolescents because they help them to effectively communicate, think critically and creatively, and make rational decisions in their lives. Life skills education helps empower the youth to act responsibly in society. These life skills are important because they will help teenagers cope with problems they face in their everyday lives. Thus, the present paper intends to explore the challenges and issues of life skills education among adolescents.

Keywords: Life-skill Education, Challenges, Issues, Adolescent, Need and Importance.

Introduction

Adolescents and youth in general are considered to be the most productive and important members of any society due to their abundant physical and intellectual capacity. But due to a lack of guidance, support, and motivation, most of them are unable to utilize their true potential in an appropriate way. As a result, a large number of youths are led astray and are engaged in anti-social activities that lead to serious social problems like alcoholism, smoking, sexual abuse, and drug abuse. These vices drain the physical and intellectual capabilities of our youth and lead them towards high-risk behaviour, which ultimately percolates into society, affecting all its members to a large extent. This serious issue requires immediate attention and an effective response from a socially responsible system of education. Unfortunately, neither the government, educational boards, nor universities have stepped forward to initiate such a program in our country to shape and mould the youth in a real sense.

Though value education is introduced as a subject in most of our schools, it cannot be synonymous with the term life skills." Values taught in the formative years do form a framework or a blueprint for our lives and influence us all throughout in a very subtle way, but life skills are those that help us translate those values into action for practical utility in life. Life skill education plays a vital role in increasing awareness among adolescents and youth about social problems and issues and focusing on weeding out those evils that are detrimental to society. Thus, life skill

education helps them improve their decision-making skills and learn to conform to and contribute their best to the society they live in.

Adolescents are a key part of our society, literally our 'tomorrow'. The onus is the largest on educational institutions, after parents, to produce responsible and balanced individuals who can become an asset to society and the world at large. The world today is changing at a very fast pace, and today's society is more diversified both politically and demographically, which is very demanding. Our adolescents and youth face multifaceted challenges that include complying with social demands and the need to be groomed for maintaining the quality of civic life. Social cohesion enables them to develop into healthy, productive individuals, equipped to face various challenges in life. Defining such skills can help us identify overarching goals for monitoring and evaluating education and intervention practices.

Life skills help youth navigate the challenges of everyday life and enable them to develop into healthy, productive, and responsible individuals. Life skills are innumerable, some specific to certain risk situations and others of a generic nature.

The notion of life skills draws its roots from the inherent desire of mankind to live a fulfilling and happy life in coherence with the environment. Human beings tend to learn skills for life from a very young age and keep evolving with the passage of time, learning to deal with the complexities of life. This need is enhanced during certain phases of life. Adolescence is one of them. Adolescence is the period of human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is marked by a tremendous pace of physical and psychological human development and change that is second only to that of infancy (WHO, 2009; www.who.int. Adolescent health). The adolescents are in a state of confusion, stress, and uncertainty about coping with their lives due to mood disturbances brought on by hormones and the immaturity of the "impulse control" centre in their brains.

Today's fast and materialistic life has left out the emotional part of humans. Society is considered a more conducive place for the cultivation of certain non-academic goals that are more needed in the present-day adjustment to the environment. It is very evident that adolescents are undergoing tremendous turmoil during this stage (Damle, 2013). Adolescents are unable to understand the emotional turmoil happening within themselves and thus are unable to effectively tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations, and anxieties about the future, which are often the driving force behind high-risk behavior (Chhadva & Kacker, 2013). With a tremendous shift in the structure of society, there is a reported rise in teen stress, which can be because of disturbed family dynamics, peer pressure, the inability to cope with studies, drug abuse, a lack of competence, etc., leading to maladaptive behaviour (Singh & Kaur, 2015).

According to WHO (1997), life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. UNICEF (2002) defines life skills as psychological and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop the coping and self-management skills needed for a healthy and productive life. Life skills can be applied to actions directed at either the self, other people, or the local environment; their goal is to promote health and wellbeing at all these levels.

For young people, life skills are the abilities that enable them to deal with the challenges of their lives in a manner that is adequate for their age and experience. They facilitate healthy, positive, and productive personal development and enable meaningful contributions to society. Life skills are also defined as problem-solving behaviours 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 on societal norms and community expectations (Wikipedia, 2011).

Life skills in general are the abilities that help to promote well-being, positive health outcomes and productive development. These are core skills that empower youth to take steps to promote health, positive social relationships and positive contributions to society. Life skills are important in helping them shape the world, not just cope with it. Thus, the concept of life skills transcends previous concepts such as coping and adaptation to circumstances; it presupposes an active, autonomous and responsible stance towards the self in the social world. (Rychen & Salganik, 2003)

Life skills can be best understood as the abilities for positive and adaptive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with day-to-day needs and challenges. “Adaptive” means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust to difficult circumstances. “Positive” behavior implies that a person is capable of handling adverse situations and can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions (WHO, 1993). Life skills mean the everyday skills that people need to live a liberated life and the skills that they need to relate to other people. In paying attention to skills learning, it is important that we remember the vital role that life skills play and that we develop them in everyone. Life skills are those skills that are not related to a certain intellectual or vocational discipline, but they describe the basic competencies for maintaining a fulfilling and independent existence. Actually, no life skill is used alone; there is always a combination of more than one. Major life skills include problem solving, decision-making, creative and critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, self-awareness, and coping with stress and emotions. These life skills have further been clustered by WHO (1995) as thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. Effective acquisition and application of life skills can impact the way we sense things about ourselves and others and equally influence the way we are perceived by others. They contribute to our perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem (www.jsscon.org) and can be acquired by instruction and also by personal experience.

The emphasis on the development of life skills draws its roots from the Vedic education system, whose main objective was to develop the physical, moral, and intellectual powers of men. It was not merely theoretical but related to the realities of life. The pupils comprehended the various problems of life through listening, intellection, reflection, and meditation (Disha Education, 2015). Life-skills-based education is now recognized as a methodology to address a variety of issues of child and youth development and thematic responses, including HIV/AIDS, violence against children, and the status of women (World Development Report, 2007). Life skills are operationalized in specific situations. Opportunities have to be provided for developing these skills. The two basic institutions laying the foundation for these skills are the family and school. The Skill India Campaign-2015, initiated by the Government of India, places emphasis on the development of life skills and other tailor-made, need-based programs for specific age groups like language and communication skills, personality development, management skills, behavioural skills, and job and employability skills (skillindia.gov.in/). The Discussion document on the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) has recognized the importance of linking education with life skills: “it is through these skills that pupils can fight the challenges of drug violence, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, and many other health-related problems. In the Indian context, a UNESCO study on life skills (UNESCO, 2000) in non-formal education has identified self-awareness as the first necessary life skill, especially for the disadvantaged and the disabled who need a self-image. The twin of self-awareness is empathy. Awareness of oneself should be counterbalanced by awareness of others, their different feelings, and their desires.

The importance of life skills education and the benefits of imparting life skills education in our curriculum, i.e., developing social, emotional, and thinking skills in students, are important building blocks for a dynamic citizen who can cope with future challenges and survive well. The core life skills: There are ten core life skills that are suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997). These are:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Self-awareness means the ability to understand ourselves. It involves about awareness of our own emotions, behaviour, strength, weakness etc. People who have great sense of self-awareness may know their strong and weak points.
2. **Empathy:** Empathy is another important life skill which helps us understand others in a better way. It is the ability of an individual to understand and accept others whose thinking and behaviour may be different from us and this lead to develop interpersonal relationships in the society.
3. **Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking is the ability to think critically or to make intentional and intelligent judgement about the people, object, events etc. It helps us to decide the importance or significance of what is observed or communicated and to find out the justification before accepting any conclusions.
4. **Creative Thinking:** Creative thinking is a process through which people may develop something new; it may be new or unique things, ideas etc. This creative process involves evaluating the existing situations and develop new ideas or solutions. Individual having strong creativity can find out solutions to very problems of their life.
5. **Decision making:** Decision making is another important life skill that help us to take right decisions. It is the ability of an individual to choose the right choice among the available options or alternatives.
6. **Problem Solving:** Problem solving is the ability of an individual to find out every possible solution to the problems of life. Human life is problematic and every individual face problem in their life. Therefore, this problem-solving skill helps an individual to face problem confidently and find out effective solutions.
7. **Effective Communication:** Effective communication refers both verbal and non-verbal communication ability of an individual. It helps us to develop our communication skills and improve our ability to express not only feelings and wishes but also needs and anxiety, stress and seeking guidance from others.
8. **Interpersonal Relationship:** Interpersonal relationship is the ability which enables us to collaborate positively with others. It helps us to maintain friendly relationships in the family or in the society.
9. **Coping with stress:** Stress is inevitable part of human life. Every individual feels stress in their life; may it be academic stress, work stress or any other personal stress. Therefore, coping with stress skill helps us to identify the source of stress in our lives and to manage it effectively which ultimately lead to live a happy life.
10. **Coping with emotions:** Coping with emotions is the ability to understand emotions of ourselves as well as others. It helps us understand how emotions influence behaviour of an individual and respond appropriately to different emotions.

Need And Importance of Life Skills Education for Adolescents

Adolescence is a transitional period of human life when various physical and psychological changes occur. Adolescents, also known as teenagers, youth, and young people, form a distinct population group in society because of their unique biological, psychological, and social characteristics. During this period, adolescents try to adjust their behaviour and attitude according to the needs of society. The youth in this stage start to think differently. They like to be independent of their family members, establish friendships with their peers, and develop their own beliefs and attitudes. To cope with these changes and to adjust and perform effectively in society, life skills education is very important for every teenager during their adolescence period.

1. Life skill education is a program of teaching the core life skills in an effective teaching-learning environment. The major objective of the life skills education program is to help students with the strategies to make the right decisions that contribute to a meaningful life. Life skills education enables individuals to understand themselves as well as evaluate their

strengths, weaknesses, and development level. It also assists youth to behave effectively in society, to adjust to the changing environment, and to make responsible decisions. Life skills help adolescents improve their lives. In the life skills education program, basic skills-building activities are taught through group discussion, brainstorming, role play, etc. These life skills help an adolescent overcome problems they face in their life. By acquiring these skills, young people learn to interact with others in society. It helps them control their feelings and take the right decisions whenever needed. The need and importance of life skills education for adolescents are discussed below: Life skills are important for adolescents because they help them in developing social and emotional skills which is needed for adolescents in successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

2. It assists teenagers to develop social skills as well as problem solving ability which ultimately help them to shape their own particular personality.
3. It promotes positive social attitude and behaviour among the adolescents.
4. It is necessary for promotion of self-esteem, peace and self confidence among the adolescents.
5. It is important to prevent anti-social activities and behaviour of adolescents.
6. It helps adolescent to stay away from using tobacco, alcohol etc.
7. Life skills are needed for the adolescents for being able to explore the alternatives.
8. It is also necessary for adolescents to make rational decisions in their life.
9. It is important to develop critical thinking, creative thinking etc.
10. It is necessary to maintain good social or interpersonal relationships in the society.

Thus, life skills are important in our personal as well as social and emotional development. Life skills help students to adjust effectively in school environment. These skills also help young people to increase working ability which lead them to success in work situation. Therefore, life skills education should be provided to every young individual to become happy and successful in their lives.

Challenges to Life Skills Education

In the current scenario of increased industrial development, urbanization and rampant globalization, the children hitherto are a confused lot. There is a lot of stress on achievement and performance by the teachers and parents. As contemporary educationists rightly put it, the focus of the current education system is on what the child doesn't know rather than on what the child knows (Khatoon, 2015). Indian education system has been blatantly influenced by the mechanistic, bureaucratic organizational theories developed at the time of the industrial revolution and have adopted a hierarchical top-down management approach in organizing the education system. In the process, the child is being viewed as just a product of the system (Singh, 2015).

Everyday millions of children enter the gates of Government and corporation schools to become something in life. Schools focus primarily on imparting scholastic knowledge of science, mathematics etc. But precious little is being done for the all-round development of children. Organized efforts are not made to enable young children to develop into responsible social beings with a competence to respond to their personal, social and cultural needs (Akshaya Life Skills, 2012).

In the whole world, the teaching of life skills education has been buffeted by numerous challenges since its inception. In India, the first challenge to life skills education probably dates back to the time of the British rule in the country. The present educational system of India was an implantation of British rulers. Kanigel (1991), author of 'the man who knew infinity—a life of the genius Ramanujan' has this to say about the Indian education system of pre-independence period -it was designed after all to churn out bright well rounded young men who could help

their British masters run the country....not restless ambitious spirits'. The British shaped and created the Indian educational system accordingly and we, on our part, have accepted the regimented policies imposed by them in the name of education and have continued to obey it till date in right earnest. To date, the Indian educational system is obsessed with producing individuals who are unable to think for themselves or even acquire the knack of independent work, to take ownership and responsibility and to solve problems and take decisions (Subitha, 2013).

The second challenge to LSE is, rapidly changing professional, social, moral, ethical, religious and family values have changed the life styles in the present society especially among the youth. Certain inbuilt buffers of the society like family support and control; extended family system; and traditional ways of thinking are no longer available to the adolescents. In tough times, when adolescents could not find any solace and have no skills to come out of all this, then it led to depression, substance abuse, suicide and crime among them (Khera and Khosla, 2012).

Thirdly, in Indian schools, the life skills education is conceptualized as a variant of value or character education. Ramakrishnan (2010) stated that in most schools, value education is confused with life skills education. Most schools have value education as part of the curriculum as it is one of the requirements of the NCF, though there is not much emphasis on life skills education.

Further, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) also considered life skills training as its agenda for the upper primary girls along with providing quality elementary education. Yet, classroom observations of Government schools in few districts of Tamil Nadu have shown that life skills education has often been confused with vocational education (Subitha, 2013). These observations indicate that the Indian education system has not yet awakened to the requirement of life skill training programmes in its schools.

The next challenge to life skills education is non- involvement of adolescents in household chores and school events. In this context, Ranjekar (2008) elaborated that basic reason of poor life skills training among Indian adolescents is to deprive them from experiences of helping parents in household chores. He further stated that one of the common criticisms of the existing education system is that, it tends to be bookish and detached from real life. Most of the education seems to be focused on mere cognitive skills revolving around rote learning of the content of subjects. Life skills such as critical thinking, ability to interpret, reflecting on thoughts and actions, communication, interpersonal skills and, above all, learning and relearning to adapt to ever-changing new situations in life are hardly dealt with consciously through the education process.

Lack of training to teachers on different aspects of life skills teaching and evaluation, parents' nonacceptance, inadequate teaching learning resources and low level of preparedness of teachers and school were some identified challenges related to successful implementation of LSE in schools. It's required that life skills education should be made examinable, so that students, parents and teachers take it seriously like other examinable subjects of the school curriculum. During pre-service and in-service training, provisions are to be made to equip teachers with relevant and appropriate skills which could facilitate quality teaching, learning and evaluation of life skills

It may be concluded that for better results, life skills education needs to be integrated into curriculum through curricular and co-curricular activities instead of a stand-alone subject. Chirwa (2009) and Maogoto (2011) found that school teachers were emphasising performance in subjects of science and mathematics and most teachers prefer to utilise the time allocated to LSE to teach these subjects. The inadequacy of teaching and learning resources is a common challenge for the effective delivery of LSE in schools. The successful teaching of LSE requires adequate resources.

Koloso and Makhakhane (2010) highlighted that majority of the teachers in the schools have very little information about the LSE programme. During pre-service education, the course is

delivered to student teachers only in a two days' workshop and no provisions for in-service training are made to equip teachers with relevant and appropriate skills which could facilitate quality teaching and learning of life skills. Non-availability of any specific criteria for the assessment and evaluation measures has lowered the status of life skills education.

Nileena (2012) reported that many schools in Tamil Nadu did not show much interest in the programme of life skills education and parents did not show much interest in LSE programme because this programme did not fetch any marks to students. Schools had not dedicated separate class hours for life skills education. Abobo and Orodho (2014) found that inadequate teaching learning resources, lack of training to teachers on different aspects of life skills teaching and evaluation, and low level of preparedness of teachers and school managers were some identified problems related to implementation of LSE in schools. It's required that life skills education should be made examinable, so that students and teachers take it seriously like other examinable subjects in the school curriculum.

Issues of Life -skill Education for the Adolescent

World Health Organization (WHO) defines that individuals in the age group of 10-19 are known as adolescents and this period/stage of human is Adolescence. Adolescence, a vital stage of growth and development in humans and it marks the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterized by rapid physiological changes and psychosocial maturation. Adolescence is also the stage when young people extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general. As adolescents mature cognitively, their mental process becomes more analytical. They are now capable of abstract thinking, better articulation and of developing an independent ideology. These are truly the years of creativity, idealism, buoyancy and a spirit of adventure. But these are also the years of experimentation and risk-taking, of giving in to negative peer pressure, of taking uninformed decisions on crucial issues, especially relating to their bodies and their sexuality. The following are the key issues and concerns of Adolescent Students. As a Teachers, Parents, Brothers and Sisters of the Adolescent we should know these issues:

1. **Developing an Identity** Self-awareness helps adolescents to understand themselves and establish their personal identity. Lack of information and skills prevent them from effectively exploring their potential and establishing a positive image and sound career perspective.
2. **Managing Emotions** Adolescents have frequent mood changes reflecting feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, fear, shame, guilt, and love. Very often, they are unable to understand the emotional turmoil. They do not have a supportive environment in order to share their concerns with others. Counselling facilities are not available in most of the institutions.
3. **Building Relationships** As a part of growing up, adolescents redefine their relationships with parents, peers and members of the opposite sex. Adults have high expectations from them and do not understand their feelings. Adolescents need social skills for building positive and healthy relationships with others including peer of opposite sex. They need to understand the importance of mutual respect and socially defined boundaries of every relationship.
4. **Resisting Peer Pressure** Adolescents find it difficult to resist peer pressure. Some of them may yield to these pressures and engage in experimentation. Aggressive self-conduct; irresponsible behaviour and substance abuse involve greater risks with regard to physical and mental health. The experiment with smoking and milder drugs can lead to switching over to hard drugs and addiction at a later stage.
5. **Acquiring Information, Education and Services** on issues of Adolescence Exposure to media and mixed messages from the fast-changing world has left adolescents with many unanswered questions. The widening gap in communication between adolescents and parents is a matter of great concern. Teachers still feel inhibited to discuss issues frankly and sensitively. Adolescents seek information from their peer group who are also ill informed

and some may fall prey to quacks. Fear and hesitation prevent them from seeking knowledge on preventive methods and medical.

6. Communicating and negotiating safer life situations Sexually active adolescents face greater health risks. Girls may also face mental and emotional problems related to early sexual initiation. Resist the vulnerability to drug abuse, violence and conflict with the law and the society.

Adolescence is thus a turning point in one's life, a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability. As today's adolescents are the tomorrow's adults, we should understand them in all aspects and need to inculcate Life Skills among the growing minds. Life Skills enable any one to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities. It will lead to Skilled India.

Strategies For Developing Life Skills

Life skills can be developed using following strategies:

1. **Brainstorming:** Brainstorming is a system utilized in the development of life skills. It is a process where every individual of a group will have a typical theme on which, they will discuss deliberately. In school students can actively engage in teaching learning process and get chance to share their ideas through this process which ultimately leads to the healthy development of essential life skills for adolescents including communication skills, creative thinking. Critical thinking etc.
2. **Role-play:** Role play is a method where a group of individuals or students participate in small drama acting different roles. Through role play students get opportunity to develop different life skills specially empathy and interpersonal relationships as they play role of others.
3. **Discussion:** Discussion is another important strategy of developing life skills in adolescents. Through discussions students get opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas and learn from others. It helps to understand things from others perspective. It helps an individual in developing listening skills, empathy and communication skills.

Benefits of Life Skills

Imparting life skill education in children and adolescents will bring valuable benefits which include

- Promotion of self-esteem, peace education, self-confidence etc.
- Prevention of antisocial activities and behaviour.
- Helps in the promotion of general well-being and primary prevention.
- Life Skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities and enable individuals to behave in healthy ways, given the desire to do so and given the scope and opportunity to do so.
- Results of research studies also prove that life skill education improves the academic performance of individuals.

Conclusion

Life skills enable the adolescents to live a happy and successful life. Providing life skills education helps to build the foundation for learning skills of individuals. A proper and relevant life skills education is needed for every youth to effectively adjust and participate in society. It helps an individual in proper social, emotional, cognitive development. Life skills education helps adolescents in promoting mental wellbeing which help them in the development of emotional intelligence, self- confidence as well as enhancing decision making ability, critical thinking, creative thinking skills. It is expected that the future teachers would develop essential constructs of life skills which not only help them to face challenges in life confidently but also to

enable them to train their students, to utilize the skills in their personal and professional life. Thus, life skills should be taught in every regular school by a life skills trainer/teacher/counsellor so that students learn basic skills which are very much needed in the present society to enhance mental health, peace and adjust in the changing environment.

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