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Assessment of Life-Skills Education Awareness Amongst In-Service School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills enable us to translate knowledge, attitude and values into actual abilities by helping us decide what to do, when to do and how to do. The life skill education promotes mental well-being in young people and equips them to face the realities of life. In present scenario when there are so many challenges in day-to-day life it becomes necessary to understand the concept of life skills and the reasons for its indispensability in today's world. Questionnaire study was designed to evaluate the awareness of teachers regarding life-skill education in structured way. Ninety teacher educators responded which showed that 85.6% were aware of life-skills. 97.8% stated that they wish to enhance their knowledge regarding Life skills education. 82.2 % agreed that Life skills education can be taught by teachers and 73.3% stated that experiential learning methods can be useful. LSE is necessary for teachers to help them to use their knowledge, attitude and values in a better way in their profession.

KEYWORDS: interpersonal skills, critical thinking, coping skills, need assessment

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INTRODUCTION

Skills are acquired through Practice and patience. There are different types of skills such as literacy skills, language skills, functional skills, sports skills, vocational skills, cultural skills, recreational skills, life skills etc. Among them one of the most important is life skill, though it has not been amalgamated in the curriculum, it has become imperative to know about life skills. Enhancing life skills enables us to adapt to situations and people and help us to lead a healthy and positive life. UNICEF defines Life skills as “a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills”¹

Life skills help in developing positive and flexible attitude to life. Life skills are learnt from our own experiences, perceptions, insights, stories, books, parents, teachers, religion, media, culture etc. Life skills are present in every individual. To get the best out of them we need to sharpen them regularly. Delors commission (1996) stress the need for four pillar of education-Learning to know, Learning to do, Learning to live together and Learning to be.² Learning to live together is a part of life skill which imbibes managing conflict, mutual understanding and peace.

The Life Skills Concept

The Life Skills program is a comprehensive behaviour change approach that concentrates on the developing the skills needed for life such as communication, decision-making, thinking, managing emotions, assertiveness, self-esteem building, resisting peer pressure, and relationship skills. Additionally, it addresses the important related issues of empowering girls and guiding boys towards new values. This concept addresses the development of the whole individual—so that a person will have the skills to make use of all types of information, whether it be related to health, communication and decision-making situations.³ The Life Skills approach is completely interactive, using role plays, games, puzzles, group discussions, and a variety of other innovative teaching techniques to keep the participant wholly involved in the sessions.

Life Skills – An Overview

The conceptual basis for most of the life skills work undertaken by the United Nations and its partners is the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Skills for Health.⁴

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. In particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.⁵ Skills for Health designates ten skills divided into five broad categories: (1) mother skills, (2) survival skills, (3) thinking skills, (4) negotiation skills, and (5) coping skills.

<u>Mother skills</u>	<u>Survival skills</u>	<u>Thinking Skills</u>	<u>Negotiation skills</u>	<u>Coping skills</u>
a) Self awareness It is an unbiased assessment about ones character, capacity, capability, competency, desire and dislikes.	a) Interpersonal relationship It is the ability to establish positive relationship and help us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with.	a) Critical thinking Critical thinking is making objective judgements about choices and risks.	a) Decision making Decision making is to choose from the varied options based on the existing knowledge of the topic under consideration keeping in mind the positive or negative consequences of each of the option	a) Coping with emotion Coping with emotions being aware of the predominant emotion that preoccupies the mind at any point of time, knowing how emotions influence behaviour, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.
b) Empathy It is the imaginative transposing of ones self to the thinking, feeling and acting of another.	b) Communication Communication is a dynamic and ongoing process which interacts and leads to change in behaviour and attitudes of individuals.	b) Creative thinking Creativity is a unique way of thinking, which bases on the insight we have in a particular area.	b) Problem solving A Problem arises when there is a controversy between two needs. People, who like to improve, welcome it and meet it as a challenge and opportunity to improve themselves.	b) Coping with stress Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognising how this affect us physically and emotionally and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax.

OBJECTIVES:

- To assess the extent of awareness of life skills education amongst teacher educators;
- To establish to what extent teachers understand the need of life skills education
- To establish how teacher educators implement life skills in their teaching
- To assess the difficulties and challenges they face during implementation of Life skills education

MATERIALS AND METHODS

An opinion questionnaire was designed to evaluate the awareness of teacher educators regarding life skills education (LSE) in a structured way. This questionnaire (Appendix no. 1) was designed to investigate LSE knowledge and practices among the in-service teachers. The questionnaire was validated by experts from the field of Education. The experts’ comments were studied and instruments were modified accordingly.⁶ The questionnaire was then distributed to in-

service teachers registered with IGNOU program conducted by CASE, MS University, Vadodara. The questionnaire was collected from the respondents and analysed.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections depending on different parameters related to the objectives of study. The first four sections consisted of closed ended questions whereas in section five one question was open-ended.

They various sections covered the questions related to respective skills and knowledge. They are as under

Section I: Awareness

Section II: Need Assessment

Section III: Implementation of Life Skills

Section IV: Method of training

Section V: Challenges & Achievements during implementation

The data was then transferred to SPSS 13 software which was computed for inferential and descriptive statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of in-service teachers who agreed to participate in study was 90. There characteristics like - graduate or post-graduate and teaching experience in years of the participants was taken for this study.

Group characteristics

90 teacher educators attending IGNOU training program conducted by CASE, MS University, Vadodara were the participants for the study. Among them 44(48.9%) were graduates and 46 (51.1%) were having post graduate degree. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 to 20years with mean 7.24 (std. dev +/- 3.939).

Awareness of the participants

The results related to awareness of the participants was analysed which showed that 85.6% participants agreed that they are aware of the life skills, but remaining either did not know about it or were not sure. Participants stated that they read about life skills in their regular course, or workshop, few told that they knew through media or training program. Most of the participants agreed that Life skills enables individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life whereas, 14.4% either disagreed or they did not knew. Most of them knew which board has incorporated LSE. 44.4% of participants disagreed about age specification. 75.6% in-service teachers were not aware of the person/organisation who laid down ten core life skills.90% agreed that Life skills are important for growing minds. 64.4% disagreed that Teachers are not ideal individuals to teach LSE, as they are not close to adolescents. 80% mentioned that Life skills are the

responsibility of the teachers. 55.6% disagreed about good student is one who is very obedient in the school. 23.3% agreed whereas 58.9% disagreed that Good academic achievement in school by adolescents is related to their intelligence only. 81.1% agreed that School is an ideal setting to impart life skills education to adolescents.

Need Assessment

The frequency distribution for need assessment of in-service teachers is given in table 1.

Table 1: Frequency distribution for need assessment

S. No	Opinion	Agree in %	Disagree in %
1.	I wish to enhance my knowledge regarding LSE	97.8	1.1
2.	Life skills education(LSE) should be included in the curriculum	96.7	1.1
3.	The students need to be taught about alcoholism and drug abuse	88.9	6.7
4.	Life skills education should be considered as part of school curriculum	92.1	5.6
5.	Only parents should teach life skills education to their adolescents	3.3	86.7
6.	Life skills in students can increase adaptability of children in the school	80.0	5.6
7.	Life skills education promotes health in children	62.2	16.7
8.	Life skills education will result in improved academic performance decrease in school dropouts, and better adjustment in school related activity	75.6	7.8
9.	Adolescents from rural areas do not need life skills education	3.3	88.9
10.	Adolescents who come from urban areas/ rich families only need LSE	0.0	95.6
11.	Girls need life skills education more than boys	17.8	74.4
12.	Adolescents from religious families do not need like skills education	4.4	87.8
13.	A discipline school is the only means of making adolescents better citizens	21.1	55.6
14.	Life skills are necessary only for adolescents from disturbed families	8.9	82.2

Implementation of Life Skills

The related question opinions by the participants are shown in Table 2. Most of the topics which they used for teaching using a life skills approach were multiple and most of the topics were covered.

Table 2

S.no	Opinion	Agree in %	Disagree in %	Cannot say in %
1.	Creative thinking should be incorporated in classroom teaching	86.7	8.9	4.4
2.	Critical thinking should be incorporated in classroom teaching	73.0	7.9	19.1
3.	Teacher should educate the students how to cope with stress and emotions	95.6	2.2	2.2
4.	Teacher should understand the term empathy and teach them to students	90.0	5.6	4.4
5.	Adolescents need not learn problem solving or decision-making skills because they are too young	5.6	82.0	12.4
6.	Adolescents are very talkative and hence there is no need to teach interpersonal and communication skills	10.2	81.8	8.0
7.	Advice for adolescent by teacher is sufficient to increase emotional and social abilities in adolescents	23.6	53.9	22.5

Method of training

82.2 % and 73.3% agreed that Life skills education can be taught by teachers using experiential learning methods respectively. Almost 51.1 % used multiple methods in teaching of life skills. 92.2% Respondents' stated that skills can be effectively taught to children through games, role-plays and group discussion. The training method/s which was most preferred for life skills

education was workshop, manual and group discussions. 59.6% agreed whereas 40.4% either did not agree or could not say whether they would try to influence their colleagues to rethink old teaching methods.

Challenges & Achievements during implementation

Most of the participants stated that lack of sufficient ability to manage the class and stimulate discussions; difficulties regarding time management; the special classrooms for conducting "Life Skills" classes are not yet allocated; and transition to new teaching methods was accepted not equally by other subject teachers were the difficulties faced by them.

Many of them who had incorporated LSE in their teaching had concrete achievements. 75.5 % encountered surprises and 93% stated that children become more self-confident, more easily communicate with others, express their ideas in a more free and easy manner.

Other observations which were made by participants were stated like this; "children became independent and self-reliant", "more training for students and teachers is required", "storytelling in schools more effective way awareness of LSE helps to do better"; "parents became defensive for their children"; "students became good decision maker"; "more interactive programs should be there"; "will be more helpful to village students for motivation in education program"; "mischievous students became responsible"; "students who score low in academics were doing great"; "improved interpersonal relations".^{7,8}

Few of them mentioned that it is "not included in curriculum so they are not practising LSE". Many stated that they "need more knowledge and training"; "LSE experts should be part of school for better understanding"; "professional and resource person should be called to deliver lecture"; and should be "implemented effectively in every school".

Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programming

A large number of development and implementation challenges were found to be common across many countries in South Asia: Most in-school life skills programmes are taught in secondary schools, which many South Asian children never attend. For those who do attend, the programming is usually taught years after the likely exposure of students to risks. The importance of rapidly moving to a seamless life skills-based education approach starting in primary school in all countries was highlighted in the assessment. The large number of locally offered in-school extracurricular activities, (usually through NGOs), which circumvent official approval processes, is a tacit acknowledgement of the difficulties of integrating life skills into education systems. The content of life skills programming was not always relevant or appropriate, and the methods used were not always effective, particularly with different types of learners. Many programmes made no provisions to support learners in the use of their new life skills outside of the classroom, with their

families or in their communities. In general, the selection and training of trainers and the provision of in-service support to trainers were generally inadequate, with insufficient attention paid to building confidence with the content and teaching methods. Monitoring of classroom delivery quality usually did not occur. The use of cascade training and peer education methods were problematic. The participation of learners in programming was limited. Life skills-based education tended to be dealt with on the margins - or fully excluded - from reform initiatives in the wider education sector.⁹

The assessment clearly highlighted the shortcomings of extra-curricula or project-related life skills-based education in schools that are common across South Asia, and stressed that inschool programming needs to be integrated into the formal curriculum to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. Likewise, programming for those especially vulnerable who are not in school would benefit from increased government interest and oversight. Ref.(Life Skills-Based Education in South Asia. A Regional Overview prepared for: The South Asia Life Skills-Based Education Forum, 2005, UNAIDS, UNICEF)

CONCLUSION:

Life skills education is necessary for teacher educators because they are the one who are going to produce effective and efficient teachers to the society. 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.

Practicing life skills and exhibiting their Professional identity should be the venture of teacher educators of the 21st century. There is no end to the level of the quality of the skill. Dedicated and sincere attempt should pay the way for internalizing life skills among teacher educators.

Here in present study the importance of life skills education in the life of children is recognizable. Additionally, the core life skills and the organised course of action are required to enhance the teaching skills of teachers’ for life skills education in children. Finally I validate the need of an interactive educational programme; well-planned curriculum with good infrastructure support by the school authorities, state and national government; and an active learning technique for life skills enhancement amongst the in-service teachers.

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