

Innovative Methods for Teaching Life Skills in Contemporary Education

***Dr. Faridah Ali**

Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Education is basically a man making process and it implies practicing and ensuring transformation of the human stuff at various levels. In life education thus enables an individual to live his life efficiently and successfully. Every individual has certain goals in life and he/she tries to achieve those goals. In this endeavour he/she has to acquire certain skills to lead a happy life in the present democratic society that encounters a number of challenges in economic, social, political and technological fields. These skills are known as life skills. Every teacher has to keep these life skills in his mind while creating optimum and challenging learning atmosphere in the classroom situation.

I. INTRODUCTION

What are life skills

A skill is a learned capacity to carry out pre-determined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy or both. It is an art or way of expressing one's idea. It is an ability or capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or job functions involving ideas, things and people. Skills refer to superior performance that is acquired through extended practice and training.

Life skills are the set of human skills acquired via teaching or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily human life. Life skills are abilities to adapt positive behaviour that enables us to deal effectively with other culture and environment. So the meaning of life skill is the same as the skill for life.

Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". They represent the psycho-social skills that determine valued behaviour and include reflective skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking to personal skills such as self-awareness, and to interpersonal skills.

Basically, life skills can mean a lot of different things, and different people need a different set of skills to survive and to fulfil their needs. The most important skills in life, of-course are the survival skills that people need to develop to meet their individual or specific needs. There are many different understandings of life skills but there is currently no known definition of life skills. Different organisations attach different meanings to the term.

The Mental Health Promotion and Policy (MHP) team in **WHO's** department of Mental Health has produced this definition of life skills:

Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way. It contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and protection of human rights (WHO, 1999).

II. CLASSIFICATION OF LIFE SKILLS

UNICEF (2006) has defined life skills as psychosocial and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important for development of behaviour. It classifies life skills into following domains.

- Communication and Inter-Personal Skills
- Decision Making and Critical Thinking Skills
- Coping and Self- Management Skills

Communication And Interpersonal Skills

It is further classified into 5 sub-categories:

1. Interpersonal Communication Skills

- Verbal/non verbal communication
- Active listening
- Expressing feelings; giving feedback (without blaming) and receiving feedback

2. Negotiation/Refusal Skills

- Negotiation and conflict management
- Assertiveness skills
- Refusal skills

3. Empathy

- Ability to listen and understand another's needs and circumstances and express that understanding

4. Co-operation and Team Work

- Expressing respect for other's contributions and different styles
- Assessing one's own abilities and contributing to the group

5. Advocacy Skills

- Influencing skills and persuasion
- Networking and motivation skills

Decision Making And Critical Thinking Skills

It is further classified into 2 categories:

1. Decision Making/Problem Solving Skills

- Information gathering skills
- Evaluating future consequences of present actions for self and others
- Determining alternative solutions to problems
- Analysis skills regarding the influence of values and attitudes of self and others on motivation

2. Critical Thinking Skills

- Analyzing peer and media influences
- Analyzing attitudes, values, social norms and beliefs and factors affecting these
- Identifying relevant information and information sources

Coping And Self Management Skills

It is further categorised into 3 categories:

1. Skills for Increasing Internal Locus of Control

- Self esteem/confidence building skills and weaknesses
- Goal setting skills
- Self evaluation/self assessment/self monitoring Skills
- Self awareness skills including awareness of rights, influences, values, attitudes, rights, strengths and weaknesses

2. Skills for Managing Feelings

- Anger management
- Dealing with grief and anxiety
- Coping skills for dealing with loss, abuse, trauma

3. Skills for Managing Stress

- Time management
- Positive thinking
- Relaxation techniques

WHO (1999) has defined life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The WHO categorizes life skills into the following three components:

1. Cognitive Domain
2. Affective Domain
3. Psychomotor Domain

Cognitive Domain-It includes critical thinking skills/decision making skills/creative thinking skills.

Affective Domain-It includes coping/self awareness and self management skills.

Psychomotor Domain-It includes interpersonal/communication skills.

UNESCO (2001): Life skills are the abilities that promote mental well being and competence in young people to face realities of life .UNESCO mentions that life skills consist of three major types:

Learning to Know (cognitive abilities)- it includes decision making skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills.

Learning to Be (personal abilities)-it includes self awareness skills, anger management skills and positive thinking skills.

Learning to Live Together (interpersonal abilities)-it includes assertiveness skills, counselling skill, influencing skill, facilitation skill and skill of active communication.

III. CORE LIFE SKILL STRATEGIES

UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO listed ten core life skill strategies that are pivotal to lead a healthy and happy life, so that all the human resources can be utilized productively. They represent the psycho-social skills that determine valued behaviour and include reflective skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking to personal skills such as self-awareness, and to interpersonal skills. Practicing life skills leads to qualities such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, to action competencies to take action and generate change, and to capabilities to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be. Life skills are thus distinctly different from physical or perceptual motor skills, such as practical or health skills, as well as from livelihood skills, such as crafts, money management and entrepreneurial skills. Health and livelihood education however, can be designed to be complementary to life skills education, and vice versa.

These are:

- ❖ Self Awareness Skills
- ❖ Interpersonal Relationship Skills
- ❖ Effective Communication Skills
- ❖ Problem Solving Skills
- ❖ Critical Thinking Skills
- ❖ Creative Thinking Skills
- ❖ Decision Making Skills
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Skills to Cope with Emotions
- ❖ Skills to Cope with Stress

Self Awareness Skills: Self Awareness is the ability to know one's strengths, weaknesses objectively and one's likes, dislikes, attitudes correctly. That means knowing oneself as he or she is. It includes:

- Self Evaluation Skills
- Self Monitoring Skills
- Confidence Building Skills
- Goal Setting Skills

Interpersonal Relationship Skills: interpersonal relationship is the maintenance of friendly, healthy, purposeful and successful social relationship with others. It includes

- Cooperation and Teamwork Skills
- Networking and Motivation Skills
- Negotiation and Conflict Management Skills
- Assertiveness Skills
- Refusal Skills

Effective Communication Skills: Effective Communication is the ability to convey the intended thoughts, ideas, feelings, and expectations and plans meaningfully, politely and assertively to others. It includes

- Active Listening
- Expressing feelings, thoughts and ideas
- Giving feedback and receiving feedback

Problem Solving Skills: The ability to identify the problem correctly, understanding its sources and causes is the first step in solving a problem. Later, the causes have to be reduced or eliminated at the first stage. Then the sources of the problem have to be handled carefully. Afterwards alternative solutions have to be thought of. The best possible solution can be adopted. It includes:

- Careful and systematic approach
- Clear focus
- Keen observation
- Analyze and synthesise faculty
- Ability to generalize

Critical Thinking Skills: Skills of estimation of positive and negative dimensions of an experience or event without the influence of personal bias, is critical thinking. It includes:

- Analyzing attitudes, values, social norms and beliefs and factors affecting these
- Analyzing peer and media influences
- Identifying relevant information and information sources

Decision Making Skills: Decision making involves taking an appropriate decision after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a situation, and its future consequences. It includes:

- Information gathering skills
- Evaluating future consequences

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to imagine oneself in the position of another person and to feel and understand that person's happiness and sorrows. It includes:

- Ability to listen
- Ability to understand another's needs and circumstances
- Express understanding

Skills to Cope with Emotions: Coping with emotions is the ability to express one's emotions rationally taking the surrounding circumstances into consideration. It includes:

- Anger management
- Increasing internal locus of control
- Dealing with grief and anxiety
- Skills for dealing with loss, abuse, trauma

Skills to Cope with Stress: Coping with stress is the ability to relieve one's stress constructively without affecting one's morale. It includes:

- Positive thinking
- Time management
- Relaxation techniques
- Setting small goals
- Lowering unrealistic expectations
- Scheduling breaks and enjoyable activities

IV. LIFE SKILL BASED EDUCATION (LSBE)

LSBE refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviours. It is a structured programme which initiates participatory learning that aims to enhance positive and adaptive behaviour by facilitating individuals to develop and practise psycho-social skills and function effectively in social environment. Life skills education is an

essential component of promoting healthy and socially accepted individuals. Life Skills based education is essential to enable an individual to cope with difficulties in day-to-day life by learning to make informed decisions, solving problems, thinking creatively and critically, building healthy relationships through effective communication and further deal with risk situations.

LSBE must be able to empower an individual, a community and a society in order to ensure certain level of skills as to:

- Understand and be able to make decision, negotiate hurdles based on critical analysis and rational judgement through a systematic process of self awareness.
- Be able to communicate effectively so that one can respond to emergencies, immediate demands of situations of existing environment at large.
- Be able to cope with emotional traits like physical stress, mental shock.
- Be able to make choices among the existing alternatives so as to resist negative pressures and risk behaviours that are associated with growing restlessness and indulgence with regard to sexual health behaviour of adolescent period.
- Be able to garner support in favour of sensitivity to gender equality and justice in the area of right to education, healthcare, property, association, express opinion and participate in the decision making processes that are affecting life and well being.

Around the world, Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) is being adopted as a means to empower young people in challenging situations . Expected learning outcomes include a combination of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills with a particular emphasis on those skills that related to critical thinking and problem solving, self-management and communication and inter-personal skills. Thus we can say that LSBE is expected to ensure healthy behaviour so that young adults can successfully achieve their life goals and utilize available opportunities in order to contribute to the development of their own society at large.

V. HOW TO IMPART LIFE SKILL BASED EDUCATION (LSBE)

Life skill acquisition is not only “taught” it is also “caught” through learning that takes place through example and practice .Holistic learning demands a whole vision of the learning institution and “within the context of one’s socio-cultural milieu”, and it needs to better “tackle problems at the roots” with more “attention to gender and equalities in schools and societies”. School policies and enabling environments reinforce ideas taught in class, but we also need “to acknowledge and build on the strengths of the family and home”.

The participatory approach is the most effective method of teaching that should be used in LSBE formal approaches; here are also crucial differences. For example, whereas formal education needs to allow a more flexible education that places emphasis on process and praxes to ensure a child centred approach to life skills teaching and learning, non formal approaches would need to focus on ensuring structured learning over time. One strategy for LSBE could be to bring positive messages about people and how they integrate into the ordinary curriculum. That would require working with curriculum and textbook writers or making supplementary reading books focussed on life skills but using simple vocabulary.

VI. MAJOR ISSUES IN IMPARTING LSBE

The major challenge: Teachers lack the basic education and professional training to facilitate active learning approaches like learning-games/role-play and subsequent classroom discussion. Life skills based education with its experiential, participatory and activity based methods imposes a burden on teachers and instructors who have never experienced such ways of learning themselves. Without adequate training, which allows for the personalisation and internalisation of skills, the tendency is to revert to familiar didactic teaching approaches. Do we have well proven methodologies for teaching general life skills? what is most important for a teacher/educator to become an effective facilitator for life skills acquisition: training on methodologies or personal motivations?

More thought is also required on the selection of teachers and instructors for life skills training. Just as some people make better math or language teachers, so too, some people make life skills teachers. To this end, effort is needed to identify the personal competencies of life skills teachers and select candidates based upon their personal suitability.

Life skills based education succeeds or fails based upon teaching quality. Given this, there is an urgent need to provide quality training and ongoing support to life skills teachers and instructors. Unfortunately, training in life skills instruction is often of low quality and short duration; not allowing for the practice or internalisation of the skills. Frequently, it avoids or inadequately covers sensitive issues, and is taught by master trainers who have little experience in skills based learning themselves. Following this generally inadequate teachers are placed in classrooms with no in-service support or supervision to monitor and improve the quality of classroom delivery. Yet another problem, or excuse for inaction on this important matter, is that the curriculum is overloaded and parents want to focus on exams. Well, in this situation, moving to active learning and discussion means finding extra time. Basically, LSBE needs a period, a week, if it is to have a real impact. This can be within an existing subject or separately labelled, but the time and the training and support for concerned teachers is needed. Building the support of head teachers is very important in getting this time allocation. Life skills are skills to deal with real and perceived threats that confront a person's life. The threats seem to bother girls more than the boys as societies the world over are patriarchal and would see through the threats for males as against the threats for a girl child and a woman.

VII. HOW TO MOTIVATE TEACHERS

Well, in some places the primary school is organized around one class teacher while in others there are subject teachers. People say that science teachers concentrate on facts of aids not behaviour, which suggests that social sciences teachers could do better. But is it a matter of subject specialization or the age and motivation of the teachers?

Finally, what can be done to make life skills more central to curriculum planning and discourse? Over the last decade or so, curriculum and textbook writers have learned to be careful about gender issues, including text and pictures in which girls and women act as role models, for example. Life skills should become an important concept in curriculum planning, like gender. Life skills themes should be highlighted as separate topics, but should also constitute a foundation for the whole curriculum. Can we agree on abroad curriculum frame-work for life skills in the different years of primary and middle school, balancing integrated and explicit content.

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