



Life skill education in school for sustainable human development

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ABSTRACT

Young people are faced by many challenges because of fast changing world. The challenges are compounded by various factors such as complex developmental changes during adolescence, lack of positive role models, negative mass media influence and inadequate, inaccurate and sometimes unreliable sources of information. As a result, many children engage in antisocial behaviour. Young people today are growing up with an increasing sense of suspicion and gloom. Their mind is concluded by anxiety and trepidation about their future, academic and career. Low self-esteem and lack of effective skill can lessen students desire to learn, their ability to focus, and their willingness to take risks. Life skills “can help people to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life.” These skills are to be taught to adolescents in schools, as they can help them in successfully transition from childhood to adulthood by healthy development of social and emotional skills. Life skills training in schools must meet the social and emotional developmental needs of students for effective teaching and learning to take place and for students to reach their full potential. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control. It is based on the assumption that when young people are able to rise above emotional impasses arising from daily conflicts, entangled relationships and peer pressure, they are less likely to resort to anti social or high risk behaviors and finally leads to sustainable human development.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the means by which individuals are equipped with knowledge, skills and values that enable them to become productive citizens. Education is therefore very important in the development of both the individual and the nation. Although the formal education system has to prioritize the imparting of academic knowledge, it has become increasingly clear that such

prioritization of academic knowledge without acquisition of psychosocial skills is an inadequate way of preparing young people for the complex challenges that exist in our world today. It has been seen that Life skill education (LSE) for children and adolescents have for a long time been largely neglected in education programmes. Life skills are abilities that help to promote mental well being, competence for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable young minds to deal effectively with the demands

and challenges of everyday life (Ghosh, 1999 and WHO, 1999). UNICEF and WHO recognizes that life skills are generally applied in various aspects of life such as in the context of health and social events like human relationships, learning about social influences on behaviour and learning about rights and responsibilities, as well as being taught in the context of health problems (UNICEF, 2005). Life skills education programme is a very important and integral part of the educational system worldwide. Its strives to provide students with tactics to make healthy choices that contribute to a momentous life. It also helps the individual to increase self-control over their own health and life in general. Its means not only imparting information but also to develop healthy skills to apply adequately. Life Skills are both psycho and social. Psycho refers to those skills which deal with mental functions and processes, while social are skills which deal with a person's interaction with the environment and culture (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000 and 2004).

According to World Health Organization (WHO, 1997 a&b) department of Mental Health, LSE emerged from a growing concern about certain health problems with particular impact on young people, including HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour, drug and substance abuse, peer influence and youth suicide. According to (KICD, 2008), Life Skills Education enables individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes, and values into actual abilities in reference to what to do and how to do it. WHO (2001) observes that, young people are not sufficiently equipped with Life Skills Education to help them deal with increased demand and stress they experience. Parental influence in molding moral and social values and the traditional school curriculum are becoming increasingly incapable of equipping the young people with the skills needed to face real life. As a result LSE was conceptualized as one of the ways of empowering the young people deal with challenges of life. Young people are faced by many challenges as a result of fast changing world. The challenges are compounded by various factors such as complex developmental changes during adolescence, lack of positive role models, negative mass media influence and inadequate, inaccurate and sometimes unreliable sources of information. As a result, many children engage in antisocial behaviour such as; drug and substance abuse, early pregnancies, pre-marital sex, crime, violence, riots and general indiscipline which

depreciate their physical and intellectual capabilities. The dangerous behaviour causes a lot of harm to the affected person and the society as a whole. The rationale of this challenge is rampant due to inadequate knowledge of Life Skill Education.

What are life skills :

Many might think of life skills as things like learning finances, doing laundry, and cooking. And they are, but life skills education goes much deeper than that. WHO defines life skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life.”

Life skill education is a value added programme which aims to provide students with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life. It helps adolescents to understand their self and to assess their skills, abilities and areas of development. It also helps adolescents to get along with other people and adjust with their environment and making responsible decision. The main objective of life skill education is to enable the learner to develop a concept of oneself as a person of worth and dignity. Life skill education is a basic learning need for all individuals. Various skills like leadership, responsibility, communication, intellectual capacity, self esteem, interpersonal skill etc. extends its maximum level, if it is practicing effectively. We need to create life skill education as the cornerstone of various youth programmers and as integral part of our formal education process.

The ten core life skills as laid down by WHO are:

Self-Awareness : Self-awareness includes recognition of ‘self’, our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help us to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is often a prerequisite to effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy with others.

Empathy : To have a successful relationship with our loved ones and society at large, we need to understand and care about other peoples’ needs, desires and feelings. Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. Without empathy, our communication with others will amount to one-way traffic. Worst, we will be acting and behaving according to our self-interest

and are bound to run into problems. No man is an island, no woman either! We grow up in relationships with many people – parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts, classmates, friends and neighbours. When we understand ourselves as well as others, we are better prepared to communicate our needs and desires. We will be more equipped to say what we want people to know, present our thoughts and ideas and tackle delicate issues without offending other people. At the same time, we will be able to elicit support from others, and win their understanding. Empathy can help us to accept others, who may be very different from ourselves. This can improve social interactions, especially, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity. Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviour towards people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance, as is the case with AIDS sufferers, or people with mental disorders, who may be stigmatized and ostracized by the very people they depend upon for support.

Critical thinking- Is an ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping us to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

Creative thinking- Is a novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components – fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas).

Decision making- Helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health. It can teach people how to actively make decisions about their actions in relation to healthy assessment of different options and, what effects these different decisions are likely to have.

Problem solving- Helps us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain.

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.

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. This means being able to express opinions and desires, and also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

Coping with stress- Means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax.

Coping with emotions- Means involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions like anger or sadness can have negative effects on our health if we do not respond appropriately.

Need for life skills education :

Life skills “can help people to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self-management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life.” These skills are often taught to adolescents, as they can help them in successfully transition “from childhood to adulthood by healthy development of social and emotional skills.” The host of factors that promote high risk behaviour such as alcoholism, drug abuse and casual relationships are boredom, rebellion, disorientation, peer pressure and curiosity. The psychological push factors such as the inability to tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations and anxieties about the future are often the driving force for high risk behaviour. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control.

Who needs life skills :

The Life Skills programme is a school based programme where Life Skills are imparted in a supportive learning environment. They are applicable for all ages of children and adolescents in school. However, the age group targeted is mainly 10-18, adolescent years, since young people of this age group seem to be most vulnerable to behaviour related health problems. The programme is for the promotion of health and well being.

How are they imparted :

The method used in teaching of Life Skills builds upon the social learning theory and on what we know of how young people learn from their environment; from observing how others behave and what consequences arise from behaviour. It involves the process of Participatory learning using 4 basic components: Practical activities, Feedback and reflections, Consolidation and reinforcement, Practical application to day to day life challenges.

How it helps :

- Help in the development of social competence and problem solving skills, which in turn help adolescents to form their own identity.
- Promote positive social norms that have an impact on the adolescent's health services, schools, and family.
- Help adolescents to differentiate between hearing and listening, thus ensuring less development misconceptions or miscommunications regarding issues such as drugs, alcoholism, etc.
- Delay the onset of the abuse of tobacco, alcohol, etc.
- Promote the development of positive self-esteem and anger control.

Benefits of teaching life skills :

Imparting life skill education in young students will bring valuable benefits which include

- Endorsement of self esteem, peace education, self confidence
- Prevention of antisocial activities and behaviour (Botvin *et al.*, 1984 and Pentz, 1983)
- Helps in the promotion of general well being and primary prevention (Perry and Kelder, 1992 and Caplan *et al.*, 1992)
- 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 (Weissberg *et al.*, 1989).

Conclusion :

Life Skills are psycho-social abilities that enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitude and values regarding their concerns into well-informed and healthy behaviors. Empowered with skills; young people are able to take decisions based on a logical process of “what to do, why to do, how to do and when to do.” Methods to improve the psychosocial competence and resilience of the adolescent as health promotional activities and development oriented approach need to be included in the school. Sexual Harassment in public spaces, institutions of education, in and around home and at the workplace is also a well established fact. Child abuse, bullying and ragging are also common and more so among boys. In this regard adding life skill in the school system of education is right based and essential. However, education, which is currently prevalent in our country, is achievement oriented than child oriented. It does not address the needs of all the children who in spite of various levels of scholastic competence are capable of learning are also in need to develop those skills, and become empowered to live effectively in this world. This empowerment is very essential in today's context in India as there is rapid globalization and urbanization with a breaking up of joint families and the traditional support systems. Academic stress, violence including bullying, sexual permissiveness, easy drug availability and abuse, crowding, poor infrastructure, social divide are some of major issues which a youth has to contend with in this rapidly changing social scene of India. An empowered child has the competence to cope with the challenges of life using the available resources even amidst such adversities. Although India has a vast human resource at its disposal, the country will have to make consistent and substantive investments in the health and well-being of its young people in order to harness their potential and for sustainable human development. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control. We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the foundation of life. Many of the things we need, can wait. The children cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed to him we cannot answer “Tomorrow”. His name is “Today” (Gabriela Mistral, 1948).

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