
Life Skill Based Education for Youth in India

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Abstract

India being the youngest nation of the world, this demographic dividend has raised high expectations in regard to the youth's meaningful participation in socio-political process; particularly civic engagement. The demographic dividend of youth with diverse needs and almost total absence of educational and skill development opportunities for them makes the youth education a most significant challenge at the present time. Youth is overburdened by a education system which is not much meaningful for them. The present education system does not align with the holistic approach towards understanding young people's lives.

As the young people step into the threshold of the external world, they are increasingly influenced by their peers and by adults other than their parents. They begin to explore and experiment intellectually, ingeniously and socially through various activities. To support them in this sensitive and tender stage, they need to develop life skills- skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision making and communication. This would help them develop self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, ability to work in teams and resolve conflicts in a rational manner. Life skills program should be an integral part of the education system in order to transmit the accumulated resources of our cultural heritage to each new generation.

Youth has all the potential. Let us all provide rational education support to them so that they keep on growing in their knowledge and understanding and keep making a difference to the nation and to the world. Then they should be fully empowered to lead India into the future.

Keywords: Life Skill Based Education, Youth in India

Introduction

Life skills help young people navigate the challenges of everyday life. They enable them to develop into healthy, responsible, and productive adults. Adolescent life skills are central to psychological theories that aim to understand how skills and competencies develop. From a practical standpoint, the promotion of life skills has been identified as a key resource for enhancing positive and productive development in youth.

Concept of Life Skill Education

The term Life Skill Education, is being widely used nowadays but it is often used interchangeably with livelihood skills. But the two are different. Livelihoods skills as the name suggests, are skills, related to generate income to fulfill one's household/individual economic goals. These skills basically involve vocational skills, business management skills etc, where as life skills encompasses all the dimensions of human life, be it economical, social or psychological.

World Health Organization (WHO) in 1993 defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life.

UNICEF defines life skills as, "a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills."

Therefore, life skills are a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills, which 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.

Life Skill Education in INDIA

Life skills education is a very important and integral part of educational system worldwide. In Indian schools however, life skills education is yet to be fully initiated and recognized as an integral part of the curriculum. Shiela Ramakrishnan, in her article in Teacher Plus, says that in most schools, value education is confused with life skills education. According to her 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. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) asserts that life skills education has been introduced in class 6th in 2003-4, in class 7th in 2004-5 and subsequently in classes 8th, 9th and 10th. The CBSE has presently introduced (in 2012) life skills training program as part of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation targeted at the adolescent students between 10-18 years of age. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) has under its agenda life skills training for the upper primary girls along with providing quality elementary education. Yet, classroom observations of Government schools in few districts of Tamil Nadu, have revealed that life skills education has often been confused with vocational education. When asked about the details of life skills education being offered in the government schools, the reply from teachers that the girl students are being taught to make dolls, stitch frocks, make candles and napkins. These data indicate that the Indian education system has not yet awakened to the necessity of life skill training programs in its schools.

A lot of thought requires to be given on how to bring in life skills education into the mainstream curriculum. The schools need to develop a nine-depth conceptual and practical framework of the program which should be made functional at all levels of schooling starting from pre-primary, extending to primary, middle and the secondary stage. The school curriculum should have lectures substantiated with situational case studies and role plays where children can practice correct behavior and experience its effects. Efficient networking of educationists, psychologists, mental health professionals and policy makers would be required to develop a concrete workable life skills training program. The training

program would need to transcend across all development stages of the child and should have an inbuilt monitoring and evaluation system.

In fact organizations like World Health Organizations (WHO) and Udayan Care have developed modules on life skills that could be adapted and used for primary and adolescent children. These modules promote the idea of responsibility for addressing one's health concerns as well as developing one's self-concept and self-esteem through case studies and role plays. WHO, in their modules on Life skills training program for adults and children assert that effective acquisition of life skills can influence the way we feel about ourselves and about others, and equally will influence the way we are perceived by the others.

Promoting efficient life skills training program in schools would thereby be an ode to the youth in the country. It would be a way of empowering youth to build their lives and their dreams. It would be a means of handholding them through the critical stages in their life and helping them tap their potential to the fullest. Thereby, it is hoped that the current education system with its oppressive rigidity would open up and make life skills education a part of its mainstream curriculum. This would enable the country to build individuals who believe in themselves, who are efficient leaders and administrators, who are able to understand their potentials and achieve them.

Life Skills – Need for Youth

The beginning of adolescence is marked by puberty, an increase in biological events leading to an adult sized body and sexual maturation. It is also a period of "Storm and Stress" for many adolescents. It is a time young people drift away and distance from parents. Spending more time with peers and conforming to the ideas and judgments of their peers are common during this period. This transition is so critical that adolescents face problems in certain areas of life such as parent-child conflicts, individual suffers role diffusion or negative identity, which results in mismatched abilities and desires, directionless, and are unprepared for the psychological challenges of adulthood. These internal stresses and social expectations lead to moments of uncertainty, self doubts and disappointment in the adolescent. It is at these situations that the young person takes risks and involves in risk taking behaviors. For these reasons, life skills education is important to help young people cope with challenges that they face in their day to day lives.

World Health Organization (1997) defines Life Skills, as abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior 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, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

The question of the link between life skills-based education and the adoption of positive and protective behavior is one of the important issues. The literature indicates that there is little evidence to suggest that teaching general life skills in schools will lead to desired behaviors. Yet the literature on HIV prevention programming, which takes a life skills approach, shows that people can be taught to adopt and sustain desired behaviors if certain criteria are adhered to. Many of them do not fit easily into school curricula. This should raise questions on how best to introduce life skills into Indian schools and programs.

Recently, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has appointed an 11 member committee to examine the introduction of Life Skills in technical curriculum. From this year, for the first, there will be a uniform curriculum for the entire country and all engineering colleges will have to adopt this. Ten per cent of the new curriculum will comprise humanities like interpersonal and life skills. The objective is to integrate humanities into engineering curriculum and to make engineers well-rounded individuals apart from making course-interesting.

Conclusion

Life skills help adolescents to transit successfully from childhood to adulthood by healthy development of social and emotional skills. It helps in the development of social competence and problem solving skills, which in turn help adolescents to form their own identity. It helps to weigh pros and cons of the situation, hence, act as a mediator to problem behavior. It promotes positive social norms that can impact the adolescent health services, schools and family. It helps adolescents to differentiate between hearing and listening and thus, ensuring less development misconceptions or miscommunications regarding issues such as drugs, alcoholism etc. It delays the onset of the abuse of tobacco, alcohol etc. It promotes the development of positive self-esteem and teaches anger control.

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