

LIFE SKILLS: A NEED BASED CONCEPT AT UNIVERSITY GRADUATE LEVEL EDUCATION

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Abstract: Basically our educational approaches give importance to develop skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. The subject matter or themes of such traditional educational system help to develop language and arithmetic skills. But today changes and challenges of fast growing society demands more contextual approach in education to meet actual use in real life situations.

Another aspect of traditional approaches is that it has concentrated too much on the instrumental and vocational skills. It is concentrated on the cognitive dimension rather than on other dimensions such as the reflective and psychological dimensions. On the other hand researchers have shown that life skills can be systematically acquired and reinforced through non formal and informal learning settings. Such learning occurs in families, communities, organization and association, the work place and through the media. They focus attention on people's empowerment and on values and attitudes such promoting a better understanding between individuals, active participation and the capacity to negotiate, to live together and to develop critical thinking. So the life skills learning need to be included in curricular. My paper deals to understand the necessity to impart Life Skills Education at University level.

Keywords: Life skills, System of education, Syllabus, Development.

INTRODUCTION:

The dramatic changes and challenges facing today related to growing unemployment, poverty, inequality, violence and environmental destruction demands more skills, abilities and creative problem solving potential. The importance of skills development of personal potential became significant when the future is uncertain. According to Delors Commission (1996) human beings future progress depends less upon continued economic growth than upon in broader personal development and empowerment that people need to steer overall development in a sensible way.

Life skills are a category of soft skills that are needed to successfully navigate the challenges of daily life, both personal and professional. They include the ability to set and achieve goals, make decisions, solve problems, and effectively manage one's time. Life skills are those soft skills that largely rest in the individual. Once mastered, life skills help a person in every aspect of his life. For example, a person who is assertive will be a better and effective communicator and enjoy better inter-personal relationships in his workplace, his family, and with his friends.

The fifth international conference on Adult Education explained that the basic education for all means that people whatever their age, have an opportunity individually and collectively, to realize their potential. It is not only a right, it is also a duty and responsibility both to others and society as a whole. It is essential that the recognition of the right to education throughout life should be accompanied by measures to create the conditions required to exercise this right.

The declaration mentioned following objectives of youth and adult education.

- a) To develop the autonomy and the sense of responsibility of people and communities.
- b) To reinforce the capacity to deal with the transformations taking place in the economy in culture and society as a whole.
- c) To promote co-existence, tolerance and the creative participation of citizen in their communities.

In short to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society in order to face challenges ahead.

DEFINITION OF LIFE SKILLS:

There are many different understanding of life skills but no universally accepted definition.

Different organizations focus different meanings to the term. The International Bureau of Education focused on four pillars of learning-learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together-and defines life skills as personal management and social skills which are necessary for adequate functioning of an individual.

UNICEF has defined life skills as psycho social and interpersonal skills that are generally considered important. The choice of an emphasis on different skills varies according to the topic.

According to UNICEF it is ultimately the interrelations between the skills that produce powerful behavior outcomes, especially where this approach is supported by other strategies such as media, policies and health service.

World Health Organization's Department of mental health defined life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psycho social skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way. It contributes to the promotion of personal and social development. (WHO 1999).

In addition to practical and vocational skills, other types of skills such as social, individual and reflective skills are also needed. These new development in the field of education and health care is beneficial for marginalized and disadvantaged group of youths and adults. In many part of the world, life skills form a significant and regular part of the school and adult curriculum.

In a Life Skills in the Context of Adolescent Education two day Life Skill Workshop organized by Remedia Trust which was supported by UNESCO, the participants accepted the following two definitions for life skills:

- 1) Life skills are abilities for adoptive and positive behaviour.
- 2) Life skills refers to the ability to maintain the state of mental and Physical well-being while interacting with others within the local Culture and environment.

Much like the definition, there is also no definite list of the life skills. This means that life skills will vary according to the conditions and situations of a person.

COMPONENTS OF LIFE SKILLS:

UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO list the following core life skill strategies and techniques as: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions.

Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one's strengths and weakness. Consequently, the individual is able to discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats. This lead to the development of a social awareness of the concerns of one's family and society.

With life skills, one is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others.

Life skills enable effective communication, for example, being able to differentiate between hearing and listening and ensuring that messages are transmitted accurately to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretations.

Depending on the socio-cultural context, age group etc, and the specific life skills needed for an individual at certain moment and context. Therefore it is not possible to draw a definitive list of essential life skills. The International Bureau of Education focused on four pillars of learning (a) learning to know, (b) learning to do, (c) learning to be and (d) learning to live together-and the following are some cognitive personal and interpersonal life skills that are generally considered particularly important.

LEARNING TO KNOW - Cognitive abilities

- 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
- 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

LEARNING TO BE - Personal abilities

- Skills for increasing internal locus of control
- Self esteem/confidence building skills
- Self awareness skills including awareness of rights, influences, values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses
- Goal setting skills
- Self evaluation/self assessment/self-monitoring skills
- Skills for managing feelings
- Anger management
- Dealing with grief and anxiety
- Coping skills for dealing with loss, abuse, trauma
- Skills for managing stress
- Time management
- Positive thinking
- Relaxation technique

LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER - interpersonal abilities

- Interpersonal communication skills
- Verbal/Non verbal communication
- Active listening
- Expressing feelings; give feedback (without blaming) and receiving feedback
- Negotiation/refusal skills
- Negotiation and conflict management
- Assertiveness skills
- Refusal skills
- Empathy
- Ability to listen and understand another's needs and circumstances and express that understanding of
- Cooperation and team work
- Expressing respect for others contribution.
- Assessing one's own abilities and contributions to the group
- Advocacy skills
- Influencing skills and persuasion Net working and motivation skills.

NEED FOR LIFE SKILL TRAINING:

Life skills play a vital role for professional success; they help one to excel in the workplace and their importance cannot be denied in this age of information and knowledge. Good life skills in the highly

competitive corporate world will help you stand out among hundreds of routine job seekers with mediocre skills and talent. Once you have joined a company too, life skills will be significant for both you and your company. The more life skills that you exhibit in your workplace, the greater and faster will be your career growth. This is especially true in the BPO, ITES and related industries. When a fresh batch is recruited by a company, the entire batch is on a level playing ground. All of them are equally qualified. How then does the differentiation happen in terms of promotions? It happens one, based on the work deliverables but it also is dependent upon the intangible 'life skills' that the person exhibits.

In today's competitive world, academic knowledge is not the only ingredient to excel in life.

For an individual to be a part of the working community or the world academic circle, it is essential to have an attractive personality; a personality that doesn't need words to make its presence known.

A well-rounded personality is one that has a confident countenance, an assertive yet likable way of speaking and a nature that attracts people naturally.

Why do you need Training in Life Skills? Suppose you are a college Student? You know your curriculum well, you have the knowledge and you know your syllabus? Good! But is that all you need to get where you want to be? Getting a job might not be a problem for you; getting a great job in a great company is where the difference lies. And great companies are always looking out for 'Groomed' individuals along with Technical Expertise.

Being in the industry is easy. Surviving is the problem here. With neck breaking competition if you're not ahead of the race you might rather not be part of it. Being intelligent alone doesn't get you anywhere. Where do you stand when you are put together with all students from all the colleges in the city? Have you been one of the top 10 students in your class? How many competitions have you participated in? How many have you won? How many certificates have you received? Are you a leader and a trendsetter or a mere follower? How good are you at what you do?

Life skills help you to find out answers.

LIFE SKILL A LIFE COURSE APPROACH:

The world Health Organization (WHO) categorizes life kills into the following three components:

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS/DECISION MAKING SKILLS:

Critical thinking allows an individual to analyse events and situations that takes place in and around him/her and he/she is able to evaluate for him/her self the influences that affect his/her thoughts and actions. The individual is also able to analyze for him/her self the information received by him/her and the authenticity of their sources.

Decision-making can be defined as the ability of a person to be able to decide what he/she wants in life. This skill enables the individual to gather information about issues and decide for him/her self what is right for him/her as he/she will be able to evaluate the future consequences of his/her own action. This skill helps the individual to find out alternate solution to several related problems.

The individual must also be skilled at evaluating the future consequences of their present action and the actions of others. They need to be able to determine alternative solutions and to analyse the influence of their own values and the values of those around them.

INTERPERSONAL/COMMUNICATION SKILLS:

a) Interpersonal communication will enhance the verbal and non-verbal communication skill of the individual whereby furthering his/her ability to listen to others as well as to express his/her feelings. This skill will also lead to a more face-to-face interaction between individuals. One acquires communication skills from birth. However, due to variations in personality traits, much of the skills are to be learned in which some people will have to put in extra effort. Also in this category, are negotiation/refusal skills and assertiveness skills that directly affect one's ability to manage conflict. Empathy, which is the ability to listen and understand others needs, is also a key interpersonal skill. Team work and the ability to cooperate include expressing respect for those around us. Development of

this skill set enables the adolescent to be accepted in society. These skills result in the acceptance of social norms that provide the foundation for adult social behavior.

b) Coping and self-management skills refer to skills to increase the internal focus of control. So that the individual believes that they can make a difference in the world and affect change. Self esteem, self-awareness, self-evaluation skills and the ability to set goals are also part of the more general category of self management skills. Anger, grief and anxiety must all be dealt with, and the individual learns to cope loss or trauma. Stress and time management are key, as are positive thinking and relaxation techniques. UNICEF promotes the understanding that the life skills approach can be successful, if the following are undertaken together:

a) The skills- This involves a group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills which are interlinked with each other. For example, decision making is likely to involve creative and critical thinking components and values analysis.

b) Content- to effectively influence behavior, skills must be utilized in a particular content area. “What are we making decision about?” Learning about decision making will be more meaningful if the content is relevant and remains constant. Such content areas as described could be drug use, HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, suicide prevention or sexual abuse. Whatever the content area, a balance of three elements needs to be considered: knowledge, attitudes and skills.

c) Methods- Skill based education cannot occur when there is no interaction among participants. It relies on groups of people to be effective. Interpersonal and psychological skills cannot be learned from sitting alone and reading a book. If this approach is to be successful, all three components, life skills, content and method should be in place. This effectively means that life skills can be learnt through the use of certain methods and tools.

CRITERIA FOR USING LIFE SKILLS:

UNICEF identifies the following criteria to ensure a successful life skills based education:

- It should not only address knowledge and attitude change, but more importantly behaviour change.
- Traditional ‘information based’ approaches are generally not sufficient to yield changes in attitudes and behaviours. For example, a lecture on ‘safe behavior will not necessarily lead to the practice of safe behavior. Therefore, the lecture should be substantiated with exercise and situations where participants can practice safe behavior and experience its effects. The adult learning theory emphasizes the adults learn that which they can associate with their experience and practice.
- It will work best when augmented or reinforced. If a message is given once, the brain remembers only 10% of it one day later and when the same message is given six times a day, the brain remembers 90% of it. Hence the needs to repeat, recap, reinforce and review.
- It will work best if combined with policy development, access to appropriate health service, community development and media.

RECOMONDATIONS: Here I strongly suggest that Life skills education is also necessary to University Graduate level students as for their maturity, social life and carrier prospects. Universities can adopt Life skills education as per requirement of locality and region.

COLCLUSION:

Life skills are something of a buzz word not only in education; it is also the focus of discussion across a range of society, region, countries, and industries around the world. Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Life skill is very needful concept in educational sector.

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