

IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS IN GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Nupur Rastogi

Fellow, Arts for Social Change



Abstract

The paper would discuss the importance of integrating Life Skills in Higher Education to empower the youth with abilities to surpass not only employment crisis but also the crisis they go through in their lives. The current higher education system prepares youth for financial stability and standard of living but still facing challenges in preparing them for psycho social stability. Life Skills are "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1999)". It is imperative today seeing the rising number of cases of Depression, drug addiction and suicide that the youth is not fully equipped in dealing with failures and emotional setbacks. The Global platforms like WHO and UNICEF have understood the significance of Life Skills in Education and keeps discussing around the challenges it faces and suggest measures to overcome it. The paper would throw light on the current status of Life Skills in Schools and Colleges as stated by Central Square Foundation research report. The paper would also discuss the questions put forth by the UNICEF national framework for Life Skills and how it can be used as parameters to gauge the current situation in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Life Skills, Higher Education, Youth and Development, Psychosocial Skills, Literary Skills.

Introduction

The higher education is important for the current knowledge based economy and hence takes significant role in the globalized world today. It does not only ensure employability but also provides an individual with a standard of living in Society. It empowers youth with literary and Livelihood skills need to be deployed in their jobs but there is a significant need of integrating Life skills in the higher education to give a holistic development to the youth. The need is to empower them not only financially and socially but also emotionally and mentally. In this agreement, UNICEF defines Life Skills as "a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills"((UNICEF, 2012) and WHO also defines life skills as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." (WHO, 1999). These organizations proposed 10 core life skills, classified as Thinking Skills/ Cognitive Skills, Social skills (WHO, 1999) that can be integrated into Higher education to have a holistic development of the youth.

Thinking Skills/Cognitive Skills	Social skills	Negotiation skills
Self-awareness Creative Thinking Critical Thinking Decision Making Problem Solving	Interpersonal relationships Communication Empathy	Coping with emotions Coping with stress

Life skills Education as suggested by Department of Mental Health, WHO contributes to basic education, gender equality; democracy; good citizenship; child care and protection; quality and

efficiency of the education system; the promotion of lifelong learning; quality of life; the promotion of peace (WHO, 1999) and thus pursuing higher education without considering the given aspects cannot be considered complete and holistic. Higher education is not only to raise employees for jobs but also individuals who know how to survive in crisis.

Importance of Life Skills in Higher Education

With the changing technology and increasing pace of changing modern life, youth is already struggling with balancing their thoughts, perspectives and lives. Digital improvement has taken over the world and has become an integral part of personal lives of the young generation. The constant exposure to social media and peeking into each other's lives develops a sense of inferiority which becomes difficult to handle by the young generation. In the current scenario of Conflict, violence, gender and ethnic discrimination, there is a sense of losing identity, fear and uncertainty which takes a toll over their emotional and mental growth. As David Docherty, chief executive of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) puts it: "The emphasis on the vital importance of non-academic skills to employability will come as no surprise to anyone in the UK higher education system. But as we quite rightly develop this agenda, we must not lose sight of the talent universities are really put on earth to deliver. They must provide us with people with the ability to continually learn, to think critically and theoretically, to be reflective and reflexive, to innovate and break the status quo, and to navigate in the unstable waters of the global economy" (Guardian, 2012) (Celia Maria Schultz, 2012)

Life skills help youth transit successfully from childhood to adulthood and leads to healthy development of emotional and social skills. It leads to development of social competence and problem solving. They are able to analyze situation and then form the opinion not going with the herd. Also, they are able to weigh pro and cons of situation and takes balanced decisions that helps in both personal and professional lives. It raises their self esteem and control management and makes them reflect at their actions. (Kawalekar, 2017).

Current Status of Life Skills in India

Central Square Foundation had issued the following table sourced from World Bank's SABER and UNICEF which depicts the existing state of Life Skills Education in India. Table: Current Status of Life Skills Education in India. (Bikkrama Daulet Singh, 2015)



Fig. 1: Student Development and Support life skills programmes (Source: Student Development and Support orientation file, 2007)

Enabling Context/	Absent	Emerging on	Established	Advanced
-------------------	--------	-------------	-------------	----------

System Alignment	(no or limited progress)	way to meeting minimum standard	(acceptable minimum standards)	
Policies (System-level documents that provide guidelines for life skills education)				
Curriculum (Curricular modules designed and developed for teacher, teacher educator, student use)				
Learning/quality goals (Mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of life skills delivery)				
Contextual evidence body (Evidence base on impact of life skills education interventions in Indian context)				
Funding (Funding allocated for life skills education Purposes)				
Pre-service in-service teacher training (Provision of preparatory and on-going professional development to teachers to ensure that teachers develop skills and expertise in life skills education)				

Challenges and Suggestive Measure

The Directorate of Student Development and Support (SDS) at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in South Africa has developed a life skills program as a strategy to bridge the gap between high school and tertiary education in an effort to improve the pass rate of the institution

as well as to prepare students for the workplace. The purpose of the life skills PROGRAM is to help students to know and understand themselves better, live life more consciously and deliberately, attain personal satisfaction and fulfillment, and achieve their goals, personally and academically (Celia Maria Schultz, 2012). The current higher education system is doing its bit to raise the standard of living for the youth. However, there is a rush towards gaining marks all directing higher education as an information based education to run knowledge based economy and its is losing out the personal and creative being of the individual. Thus, a purposeful and a well planned improvisation of the current classroom transactional pattern is needed that caters to the inculcation of all life skills given by WHO in the higher education (Carri, 2013, p. 5). Also there needs to be a provision for increasing student participation that do not force them for attendance but proves effective for their lives and makes them analyze the results of inculcating Life Skills in their lives. One of the ways can be the meaningful use of co curricular activities that exposes Life Skills in the students directly or indirectly. It can be done by making right use of technology and promoting collaborative learning. There is need of a space given to students where they can learn, experiment and grow by themselves, the space that do not just dump information over them instead make them question things. Last but not least, A proper Teacher training for Life Skills integration in higher education is the most important tool that has been sidelined till now and needs urgent recognition, solution and implementation with more contribution in research and technology. It is to note that “to secure long term support...and to engage from the very beginning, all the potential agencies that would have a role to play in the process of life skills program development” (WHO, 1999).

UNICEF's Indicative analytical framework for Life Skills (UNICEF, 2012)

Question	How to do	What to do
Are life skills included in the curriculum (formal, informal)?	Curriculum documents clearly articulate life skills	Design curriculum. Emphasis with life skills.
Is life skills education delivered as a whole-school approach?	Training of head teachers. Combination of classroom extracurricular activities. School based assessment.	Integration with school environment and culture strategies (at a district level, if feasible). Enhancing supportive and training for head teachers. Identifying and developing tools for school-based assessments.
Do the life skills PROGRAM / curriculum include relevant assessment Classroom and school based strategies?	Formative and Summative. Classroom and School based.	Support to the integration of life skills education into supervision and inspection systems Support relevant forms of assessment for knowledge.
Is there publically available data about the relevant behaviors national/regional Baseline data sets data)?	National data sets. Baseline data sets.	Conduct a baseline.
Are there criteria for selecting life skills teachers /facilitators?	Identified qualities and professional needs and experience for life skills	Work with partners to identify characteristics required and develop job descriptions where appropriate.
Do teachers have adequate Support?	Systems for mentoring, supervision, Support the	Support to the integration of life skills education into supervision

	integration of life skills education etc In-service training School head teachers have a role in support School head teachers have a role in support systems for mentoring	and inspection systems. Integrate life skills education into career structures and support systems. Review the effectiveness of existing in-service and pre-service training provision against the needs of life skills education teachers.
Are resources needed in place?	Schools have materials to teach life skills education Factual references. Activity modules, etc	Develop capacity of national partners in life skills education material development. Support resource budgets for life skills education.
Does it address pre-service teacher education for all teachers?	Any life skills education in pre-service teacher training.	Work with providers and pre-service curriculum.

Source: Indicative questions adapted from (UNICEF, Global Evaluation of Life skills Education programs, 2012.)

Conclusion

The youth is the building block of the world and determines the nature of our society. Thus, the main objective of integrating Life skills in the higher education is to assist and enhance the academic and personal wellbeing of each individual student and that is why 164 nations committed to education for all have included "life skills" as a basic learning need for all Young people (Carri, 2013). There is no gainsaying the fact that to have a dedicated workforce for the globalized economy, a healthy well being of the workforce is need. Hence, it is to note that an intelligent combination of literary skills, Livelihood skills and Life skills can minimize the challenges that the current education system is facing in bringing professional and personal well being of the youth at one pace.

References

1. Bikkrama Daulet Singh, R. M. (2015). Life Skills in India: An overview of evidence and current practices in our Current Education System. Central Square Foundation.
2. Carri, R. G. (2013). Avenues of Life Skills Development in Higher Education. GESJ: Education Science and psychology, 3.
3. Celia Maria Schultz, M. G. (2012). The Value of a Life Skills Programme at a Higher Education Institution in South Africa. International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities, 190-199.
4. Guardian, T. (2012, October Wednesday). Beyond employability: embedding Life Skills in higher education.
5. Kawalekar, J. S. (2017). The Value of Life Skills in Higher Education. IOSR Journal of Research and Method in Education (IOSR-JRME), 44, 45.
6. UNICEF. (2012). Global evaluation of Life Skills Education Programmes. New York: UNICEF.
7. WHO. (1999). Mental Health Promotion. Geneva: Department of Mental Health, WHO.