
The Role of the English Language in Life Skills of Higher Education

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Abstract

English plays a crucial role in higher education, serving as a lingua franca that connects students, educators, and researchers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Its significance is evident in various aspects, including academic communication, access to resources, global opportunities, and fostering critical thinking. One of the primary reasons English is important in higher education is that it serves as the medium of instruction in many universities worldwide. Institutions in countries where English is not the primary language often adopt it for their academic programs. This transition allows students to engage with a broader range of educational materials, lectures, and discussions. English proficiency enables students to participate actively in their courses, enhancing their learning experience and understanding of complex concepts. Additionally, many renowned universities, such as those in the United States and the United Kingdom, attract international students seeking high-quality education, further solidifying English's status as a global academic language. Today English has become the global common ground for communication. It's the language of business, education, science, and even pop culture. No matter where you are in the globe, speaking English opens up a world of opportunities for life skills, business, personal growth, and building strong relationships. This paper tries to examine how English in the workplace can enhance the growth of life skills in higher education.

Keywords: Globalization, life skills, skill education, communication, Higher education.

Introduction

"English language is our big window on the world" – that English is not just a connecting language in India but in the world as well. As English is spoken so commonly, it is referred to as a "world language". Although in most countries it is not an official language, it is actually the language most commonly taught as a foreign language. Throughout India, as well as in other countries of the world, English is rightly flourishing. English is all one can think of – the weapon of dominance and oppression, the way wealth is produced and inequalities are formed, and the mass educational instrument. Training also needs to be fully informed of the English attack. In the era of globalisation, English was no longer confined to the four walls of a classroom, an activity between the teacher and the teacher, but was accepted as a reference language for all human activities around the world.

Therefore, English language knowledge has become a requirement for professional development in the modern world. English vocabulary includes nearly all science and humanities topics and all the thoughts and words that people feel and dream about. The international markets around the world have adopted English as their contact reference language. Using technology can and will reshape our way of teaching and learning. When we pay attention to the above problems and causes, we must try to change the English language teaching scenario from primary to higher education.

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. This concept is also referred to as psychosocial competency. Life skills are the abilities that enable an individual to adopt an adaptive behaviour to fulfil the needs and demands of life so that they face the challenges effectively in life. Life skills inculcate healthy, positive, and productive progress in an individual, establish moral and ethical maturity, and enhance psycho-social skills. Life skills have become the salt and pepper of all individuals related to all aspects of life. Within education, the impact of life skills has become the essence of the teaching and learning process.

In the new millennium, education is undergoing a revolutionised change regarding science and technology, globalisation, privatisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, etc. Today's youth are facing many emerging issues, such as global warming, famines, poverty, suicide, and population explosions, as well as social, emotional, physical, and psychological issues. Cutthroat competition, unemployment, lack of job security, etc. are some of the major concerns for the educated, and as a result, they are caught in the mad race. No one has time for himself or herself to develop empathy with others and to have harmony in society. The young mind is being considered one of the most productive

members of society due to their physical and intellectual capability. But in a real-life scenario, most of them are unable to utilise their potential in an appropriate way due to a lack of guidance and motivation. Social problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, smoking, juvenile delinquency, antisocial acts, etc. have an adverse effect on them and others too, to a large extent. This new challenge requires an immediate and effective response from a socially responsible system of education. Education is now very important, but the kind of education needed to support and live life better is more important. Thus, the cardinal focus of education needs an extraordinary emphasis on developing such skills in students, as they are the important building blocks for a dynamic citizen who can cope with future challenges and survive.

Core dimensions of life skills

- **Problem solving:** The problem-solving life skills allow an individual to solve problems efficiently and effectively. Students can resolve conflict, and they can even lead to the settlement of any kind of issue. The problem-solving skills enable the students to overcome difficult situations in their daily lives. The power of critical thinking and creative thinking increases among students due to problem-solving skills.
- **Decision-making** skills enable an individual to choose the best alternative by weighing the pros and cons of various alternatives. Decision-making skills enable a person to become confident, independent, affirmative, and responsible to meet the needs and demands of life. Constructive and positive decisions will be taken for the smooth functioning of any activities taken up in life. Only after proper assessment, analysing different options, and working on the consequences will students make the right decisions for their and others's betterment.
- **Effective Communication:** Effective communication skills are the idea of sharing knowledge, feelings, facts, emotions, thoughts, and beliefs through verbal and nonverbal forms. Effective communication skills enable a person to express his views, desires, values, etc. with confidence. Good rapport and proper relationships can be maintained through effective communication skills. Social relations through active interactions can be established through effective communication skills. Leadership qualities can be inculcated among learners for their overall personality development through effective communication skills.
- **Empathy:** Empathy life skills are the capacity and ability to accept, assist, care for, and understand others's problems, situations, and circumstances that they face in their lives. Empathy is the ability to understand and identify the emotions, goals,

desires, and motivations of another person, resulting in improved prosocial behaviour. Empathy allows a person to develop listening, observing, and understanding skills while also providing mental and emotional support. Empathy is the ability to think mentally and accept the opinions of other people impartially with complete justification.

- **Coping with stress, trauma, and loss:** Coping with stress, trauma, and loss will help a person conquer the stress, trauma, and loss in his and others's lives. To deal efficiently with the tensions, frustrations, or anxiety caused by stress and trauma well in advance of their adverse effects on an individual's life. To control the emotions and balance the cognitive level, relax before the situation gets worse. This skill helps to maintain balance between positive and negative stress and how to deal with it through the most appropriate solutions. Coping with stress, trauma, and loss of life skills permits an individual to find out the source and effect of stress and how to overcome them.

Review of Literature

Roodbari, Sahdipoor, and Ghale (2013), in their research, showed that life skills training has a positive effect and improves social development and emotional and social adjustment, suggesting an increase in the compatibility of children and public health. The present paper focuses on how enhancing social, emotional, and thinking skills through life skills education helps 21st-century youngsters achieve their goals and strengthens their abilities to meet the needs and demands of the present society and be successful in life.

Haas et al. (2015) have examined the effects of age, gender, and 4-H involvement on the development of life skills among youth in the age group 8 to 18 for 1 year. Regression analysis had shown a significant influence of gender, age, and 4-H involvement on the development of life skills. Results revealed that the level of competencies of females was higher than that of males at the beginning of the programme, which changed during the year, suggesting changes in the design of the programme for engaging, retaining, and affecting males in a better way in life skills development.

Chakra (2016) has conducted a study to find the influence of personal variables on core affective life skills among 544 adolescents, of which 292 girls and 252 boys were selected. A life skills assessment scale developed by experts was used to assess the level of life skills, and a tool in the questionnaire form was used. The results show that birth order and income of the family have significantly influenced the interpersonal relationship dimension of life skills. Family type, a sibling's number, and gender have no significant influence on core affective life skills.

Bhuvaneshwari et al. (2017) studied the assessment of life skills among 40 nursing students (B.Sc., 1st year) from nursing colleges in Tamil Nadu. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design using the standardised life skills assessment scale was used to reveal the life skills score. The majority (75 percent) of them had an average level of life skills, and others had low scores in life skills. The result was found to be that there is no association between life skills scores and socio-demographic variables in nursing students.

The significance of the study

In the context of higher education, the English language has become much more than a subject taught in classrooms; it has emerged as a vital tool for academic success, personal development, and professional readiness. English is the primary medium of instruction, research communication, and global interaction in many universities and disciplines. As a result, proficiency in English significantly influences the life skills that students develop during their college years. These life skills include communication, critical thinking, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and digital and global literacy. Understanding the role of English in cultivating such competencies helps educators design more effective curricula and enables students to use language learning as a pathway to holistic growth. Life skills awareness will enhance the ability and positive attitude to search for and acquire more knowledge on life skills. Self-reflection will help the students transfer their knowledge from the classroom to the real world. Overall, life skills education is an effective social and psychological adjustment strategy. This education plays an important role in empowering adolescents physically and mentally. It helps in developing self-confidence, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, thinking ability, and critical thinking. Nowadays, it is important to integrate life skills education into the curriculum. The mental health of students should be enhanced; they should be fully developed and functional to face the challenges of life-changing situations. Life skills education contributes significantly to the overall development of students. It empowers young people to achieve their goals in the 21st century. Life skills education helps in strengthening the mental capacity so that they do not become disoriented and forget their non-existence. This paper discusses the role of the English language in life skills of higher education in the modern context.

Objectives of the study

1. To describe the role of the English language in life skills of higher education
2. To analyse the 21st-century life skills and higher education
3. To explore the National Educational Policy 2020: Building 21st-Century Skills in Students.

Research Methodology

The current research will be totally based on secondary information. The secondary resources would include journals that are reviewed by peers, articles, magazines, and other sources. For collecting secondary information, researchers will be using the data that is available on the topic that was proposed in books, journals, research work that was not published, research papers, newspapers, research articles, government sites, eBooks, and websites.

The English language plays a central role in shaping the life skills of students in higher education, acting as both a medium of instruction and a tool for personal, academic, and professional development. It supports communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and employability, making it indispensable for modern graduates.

1. Enhancing communication and confidence

English is often the primary language of instruction, assessment, and academic interaction in higher- education institutions worldwide. Proficiency in English helps students understand lectures, interpret assignment questions, present ideas clearly, and participate in seminars and group discussions, which builds confidence and reduces anxiety in academic as well as social settings.

2. Supporting interdisciplinary and academic learning

In multi-disciplinary and research-oriented environments, students must read and interpret journal articles, textbooks, and online resources predominantly written in English. The ability to analyze English-language texts develops logical reasoning, argumentation, and critical-thinking skills, which are essential for problem-solving and independent research.

3. Developing key life skills through classroom practice

English-focused courses such as “Communicative English” deliberately integrate speaking, listening, writing, and role-play activities, turning the classroom into a space for practicing negotiation, empathy, teamwork, and leadership. Debates, group projects, and presentations in English cultivate interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to adapt to diverse perspectives—core life skills for higher education and professional life.

4. Preparing for employability and global mobility

Many employers prefer candidates who can communicate effectively in English, especially in technology, business, medicine, and engineering sectors. English proficiency expands access to international opportunities such as higher-degree programs abroad, internships, and global workplaces, enabling students to function confidently in multicultural and multilingual environments.

5. Building lifelong learning and digital literacy

English is dominant in global digital platforms, e-learning portals, and online professional networks. By mastering English, students can independently access online courses, research tools, and digital resources, which supports continuous learning and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

The Role of English Language in Life Skills of Higher Education**1. English as a Medium of Academic Communication**

In higher-education institutions, English often serves as the main language of lectures, textbooks, assignments, and examinations. Students must read complex academic texts, understand spoken instructions, and write essays, reports, and research papers in English. This constant exposure strengthens comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and the ability to express ideas clearly and logically. Beyond basic language skills, such continuous practice in English builds confidence in academic settings. Students who can articulate their thoughts in English are more likely to participate in discussions, ask questions, and clarify doubts, which deepens engagement with their subjects and promotes active learning.

2. Developing Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

English medium courses expose students to texts that require interpretation, analysis, and evaluation from research articles and case studies to literary and scientific writing. When students read and respond to such material in English, they learn to identify arguments, detect biases, compare different viewpoints, and construct well-reasoned responses. This process nurtures critical thinking, a core life skill for higher education and beyond. Moreover, writing essays and reports in English demands clarity, coherence, and logical organization, which trains students to think systematically and present their ideas in a structured manner. These analytical abilities are transferable to problem-solving in professional, civic, and personal contexts.

3. English and Collaborative Learning

Group work, seminars, presentations, and project-based learning are common in higher education. Most of these activities are conducted in English, especially in multi-disciplinary and multicultural classrooms. Through activities such as debates, role-plays, group discussions, and collaborative projects, students learn to listen actively, negotiate ideas, respect diverse opinions, and work as part of a team. Practicing these exchanges in English not only improves linguistic fluency but also develops interpersonal skills, empathy, and leadership. The classroom thus becomes a micro-society where students model the kind of communication and cooperation they will need in workplaces and communities.

4. Building Emotional Intelligence and Confidence

Language learning is closely linked with emotional development. When students express themselves in English—whether in speeches, presentations, or informal conversations—they confront their fears of making mistakes, being judged, or speaking in front of others. Over time, this practice helps them manage anxiety, build self-awareness, and develop resilience. Teachers who create supportive, non-judgmental environments encourage students to take risks in using English, which fosters confidence and a positive attitude toward learning. These emotional and psychological benefits are essential life skills that contribute to academic persistence, mental well-being, and adaptability in changing circumstances.

5. Preparing for Employability and Global Mobility

English is widely recognized as the global language of science, technology, business, and diplomacy. Employers in many sectors value candidates who can communicate effectively in English, both orally and in writing. Students who develop strong English skills through higher education are better equipped to prepare job applications, attend interviews, write professional emails, and participate in meetings. Beyond national borders, English opens doors to international education, research collaborations, internships, and global job markets. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to use English empowers students to function confidently in multicultural environments and to contribute meaningfully to global conversations.

6. Digital Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Most online learning platforms, e-books, research databases, and professional networks operate primarily in English. By mastering English, students can access a vast array of digital resources, tutorials, open-access courses, and scholarly publications. This access supports lifelong learning and continuous professional development, as students can update their knowledge independently even after graduation. Moreover, engaging with digital content in English enhances information literacy skills, such as evaluating sources, summarizing information, and synthesizing ideas competencies that are crucial in the information age.

7. Integrating English into Life Skills Education

To fully realize the role of English in life-skills development, higher-education institutions should integrate communicative English, academic writing, and presentation skills into broader curricular frameworks. Courses can blend language learning with content from various disciplines, so that students practice English while simultaneously deepening subject-matter understanding. Co-curricular activities such as English-language

clubs, debate societies, storytelling sessions, and online discussion forums can further reinforce life skills in relaxed, interactive settings. Teachers play a key role by designing task-based, learner-centered activities that connect English with real-world challenges and professional contexts.

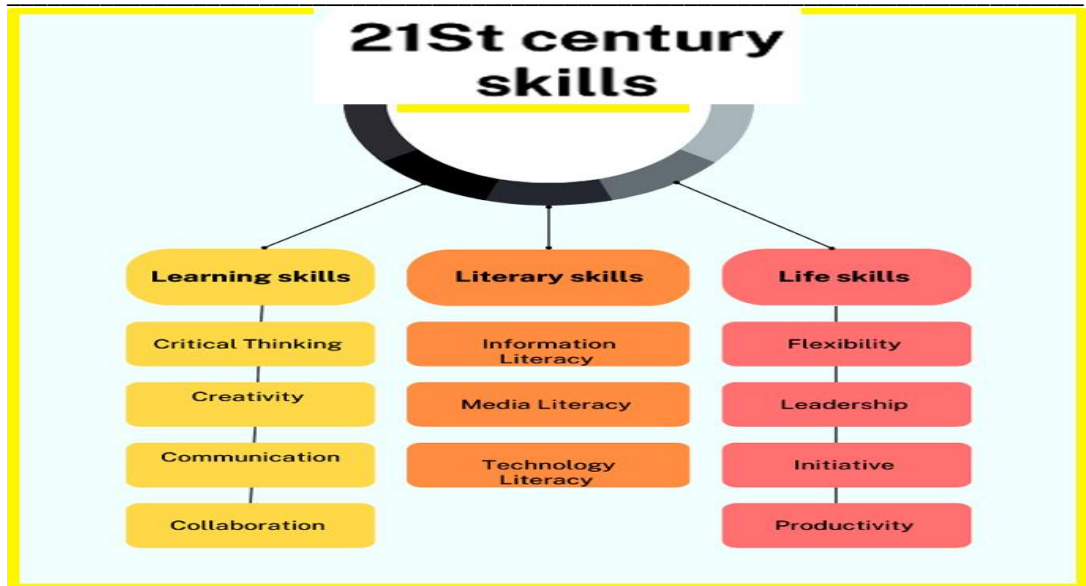
Life skills and higher education:

Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Essentially, there are two kinds of skills: those related to thinking, termed "thinking skills," and those related to dealing with others, termed "social skills." While thinking skills relate to reflection at a personal level, social skills include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that is needed for achieving assertive behaviour and negotiating effectively. "Emotional" can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view. To do that, coming to terms first with oneself is important.

21st century skills

The term **21st century skills** refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programmes and contemporary careers and workplaces. Generally speaking, 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas and in all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student's life.

It should be noted that the "21st century skills" concept encompasses a wide-ranging and amorphous body of knowledge and skills that is not easy to define and that has not been officially codified or categorized. While the term is widely used in education, it is not always defined consistently, which can lead to confusion and divergent interpretations. In addition, a number of related terms, including applied skills, cross-curricular skills, cross-disciplinary skills, interdisciplinary skills, transferable skills, transversal skills, non-cognitive skills, and soft skills, among others, are also widely used in reference to the general forms of knowledge and skill commonly associated with 21st century skills. While these different terms may not be strictly synonymous and may have divergent or specialised meanings in certain technical contexts, these diverse sets of skills are being addressed in this one entry for the purposes of practicality and usefulness.



Source: <https://vdmcbse.jayapriyavidyalaya.com/21st-century-skills>

While the specific skills deemed to be “21st century skills” may be defined, categorised, and determined differently from person to person, place to place, or school to school, the term does reflect a general if somewhat loose and shifting consensus. The following list provides a brief illustrative overview of the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits commonly associated with 21st century skills.

- Critical thinking, problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, and synthesising information
- Research skills and practices, interrogative questioning
- Creativity, artistry, curiosity, imagination, innovation, and personal expression
- Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, and initiative
- Oral and written communication, public speaking and presenting, listening
- Leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, and facility in using virtual workspaces
- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis, computer programming
- Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy
- Economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism
- Global awareness, multicultural literacy, and humanitarianism
- Scientific literacy and reasoning, the scientific method

- Environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystem understanding
- Health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety.

Blending life skills with 21st-century skills

Generally speaking, the 21st century skills concept is motivated by the belief that teaching students the most relevant, useful, in-demand, and universally applicable skills should be prioritised in today's schools, and by the related belief that many schools may not sufficiently prioritise such skills or effectively teach them to students. The basic idea is that students, who will come of age in the 21st century, need to be taught different skills than those learned by students in the 20th century, and that the skills they learn should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society.

What are the skills students will need in the 21st century?

The 21st century dawned as the beginning of the Digital Age, a time of unprecedented growth in technology and its subsequent information explosion. Never before have the tools for information access and management made such an impact on the way we live, work, shop, and play. New technologies and tools multiply daily, and the new technologies of today are outdated almost as soon as they reach the market. Numerous studies and reports have emerged over the past decade that seek to identify the life, career, and learning skills that define the skills needed for success in the 21st century world. While there are some differences in how the skills are categorized or interpreted, there are also many commonalities. Common skills across most of the studies include:

1. **Creativity and Innovation:** Using knowledge and understanding to create new ways of thinking in order to find solutions to new problems and to create new products and services.
2. **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:** applying higher-order thinking to new problems and issues, using appropriate reasoning as they effectively analyse the problem and make decisions about the most effective ways to solve the problem.
3. **Communication:** communicating effectively in a wide variety of forms and contexts for a wide range of purposes and using multiple media and technologies.
4. **Collaboration:** working with others respectfully and effectively to create, use, and share knowledge, solutions, and innovations.
5. **Information Management:** Accessing, analysing, synthesising, creating, and sharing information from multiple sources.
6. **Effective Use of Technology:** Creating the capacity to identify and use technology

efficiently, effectively, and ethically as a tool to access, organise, evaluate, and share information.

7. **Career and Life Skills:** Developing skills for becoming self-directed, independent learners and workers who can adapt to change, manage projects, take responsibility for their work, lead others, and produce results.
8. **Cultural Awareness:** Developing cultural competence in working with others by recognising and respecting cultural differences and working with others from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds.

National Educational Policy 2020: Building 21st Century Skills in Students

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was a landmark initiative for the Indian education system, calling for deep sector reform and a systemic overhaul. The policy **recommended incorporating life skills as part of the curriculum**, considering the view that education must go beyond academic outcomes to focus on the holistic development of our future generations. The knowledge, life skills, habits, traits, and career skills that are crucial for the success of a student in the current world are referred to as 21st-century skills. These are helpful for students as they move on to college and work in their adult lives. 21st-century skills are included in the strategic plans of educational institutions for preparing students better for their careers and lives. The most relevant skills include critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

The Essence of 21st Century Skills for Students

- 21st-century learning and innovation skills matter today because of the following reasons:
- Soft skills drive success in high-level courses and workplaces.
- Students are being prepared for jobs that are not yet popular today. Such career readiness needs to equip them with skills that keep them prepared for the unknown.
- The internet era has made vast amounts of information accessible to students. They need to have the skills to process and analyse this information by overcoming the challenges occurring while navigating social situations and other circumstances.
- Theoretical knowledge from textbooks is no longer sufficient. Students need to understand their practical application to efficiently solve complex problems.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) in India implicitly positions English language learning as a key avenue for developing life skills and 21st century competencies, even though it does not have a separate “English life skills”

1. English and life skills orientation

- NEP 2020 stresses that school and higher education should foster life skills such

as communication, cooperation, teamwork, resilience, critical thinking, and creativity, alongside academic knowledge. English, as one of the major languages of instruction and assessment, is expected to be taught in ways that develop these abilities through speaking, listening, reading, and writing tasks that simulate real life communication rather than mechanical grammar drills.

- Policy aligned analyses note that NEP pushes English language teaching toward a skill based, communicative approach, where learners are encouraged to think, negotiate, and express themselves in English, thus building communication and emotional-social skills.

2. Multilingualism and English

- NEP 2020 promotes multilingualism and recommends using the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction till at least Grade 5, but it also acknowledges English as an important language for:
 - Access to global knowledge and higher-education opportunities
 - Exposure to international culture and world heritage at the secondary level
 - In this framework, English is not treated as the sole medium at all levels but is positioned as one of the languages that, when used purposefully, can support cognitive, social, and professional development.

3. English in 21st-century skill development

- NEP 2020 links education with 21st-century skills such as problem solving, collaboration, creativity, digital literacy, and communication, and calls for integrating these into the curriculum. English language teaching is expected to contribute to this by:
 - Using activity based, experiential methods (projects, debates, role plays, presentations)
 - Embedding technology supported learning (online resources, blended platforms) to improve English access and digital fluency.
 - Studies interpreting NEP 2020 conclude that its constructivist, learner centred view of English aligns English language learning with the broader goal of producing holistically developed, adaptable, and resilient learners.

4. Teacher role and curriculum integration

- ❖ NEP 2020 highlights that teachers must be equipped with life skills and pedagogical capabilities to foster communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence in students. In the context of English, this means:
 - ❖ Teachers should design English lessons that integrate communication, teamwork,

and critical thinking tasks

- ❖ Teacher education programmes (such as ITEP and NISHTHA) should prepare educators to use English as a tool for life skills development, not just language testing.

Conclusion

The English language plays a critical role in shaping education, career development, science, culture, and cognitive growth. Empirical studies and experiments highlight its benefits and the opportunities it creates for individuals and societies. While challenges in learning exist, effective strategies, technological tools, and global initiatives can overcome them. In an increasingly interconnected world, English proficiency is not just a skill but a gateway to personal growth, professional success, and cross-cultural understanding. Moreover, the dominance of English in digital communication and media has reshaped how information is accessed and disseminated in educational contexts. Online learning platforms, academic journals, and educational resources predominantly use English as their primary medium of instruction, widening access to educational opportunities but also necessitating English proficiency among learners. However, the pervasive influence of English in education also raises questions of equity and access. In regions where English is not the native language, there may be challenges in providing equitable educational opportunities due to linguistic barriers. This underscores the importance of promoting multilingualism and implementing inclusive language policies that recognise and value diverse linguistic backgrounds while acknowledging the practical necessity of English proficiency in a globalised world. In this context, exploring the role of English as a global language in shaping modern educational systems becomes imperative to understand its implications for educational equity, linguistic diversity, and cultural identity in a rapidly changing world.

Life skills are a very important and integral part of the educational system worldwide. Higher education has the potential to deliver skills and research for productivity and innovation. It is important to remember that education with life skills is not another subject; it humanises education. It helps to organise thinking and effort to achieve a goal. Once an action plan has been developed, especially in the curriculum, it can be developed spirally, in depth and width. A lot of thought must be given to how to bring life skills education into the mainstream curriculum. Our educational policies and subsequent curriculum frameworks have always emphasised the need for life-skill education. Today, there is substantial evidence that life skills play a positive and important role in the development of young adults into responsible and empowered citizens. The NEP

2020 policy would reshape the education system. It focuses on providing skill-based or vocational education to the students so they can learn the basic skills required in the future. Some of the skills that the policy emphasises being there within the students are called '21st century skills' and include creativity, collaborative skills, basic life skills, and social skills. Fulfilling these needs will help students, parents, and teachers change their perceptions of the inferiority associated with the path of VET and dream of higher education and high-status occupations.

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